



PRECIPICE – The Courage to Step Off

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BIG IDEA – Our identity is intricately connected with God's calling on our life. **When our identity is in Christ, we find the courage to see what God sees.**

Scripture Focus – Esther 4:13-14 “Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: “Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?”

Who are you?

Think you're too broken or too brilliant? **Either way, you're probably wrong.**

Esther felt powerless. Saul thought he was unstoppable.
God had very different plans for both.

Our identity is intricately connected with God's calling on our life. Whether we've convinced ourselves that we are NOTHING or that we are SOMETHING, we find a dilemma.

We only know what we know, and we only perceive ourselves in this **milieu of misery** or this **entitled air of arrogance**. Or maybe somewhere in between.

We can't seem to step outside of our persona to get a clear perspective. Our two final characters from the Bible find themselves not understanding the full ramifications of their moment.

Esther did not think she had anything to offer in saving an estimated one million Jews from Haman's decree.

Saul, appointed himself as God's "Heresy Hunter." He was powerful and ruthless – but God had other plans for Paul.

Both could not see nor even comprehend what God wanted them to become.

As with last week, imagine

- losing your parents at a very young age while you were living in a foreign country.
- Your senior citizen, older cousin agreeing to raise you.
- As a teenager you get asked to be in a beauty contest with the hopes of becoming famous.
- Then you discover what it requires and are reminded to hide your national identity to stay in the running.
- Sounds like a reality show, right?

It was true reality show that took place 2,500 years ago!



Esther's STORY:

A beautiful, but overconfident [Vashti](#), denies a direct order from king Xerxes to come to him so he can brag about her beauty before his most honored guests at a massive after party that had lasted **six months!** Then a seven-day feast for men only and it featured an open bar (**Esther 1:5-9**).

Xerxes advisors' tell the King, **this denial could start a domino effect, a slippery slope leading women to rebel against their husbands all over the kingdom!** The king should banish Vashti, and declare a law that husbands are the rulers of their home and do as he pleases (**Esther 1:17-22**).

The search!

The search for a new queen providentially finds Hadassah (Esther). Along with several other young 14-year-olds, they were brought to the king's harem at Susa. They were placed in Hegai's charge. Immediately Hegai sees something unique and special about young Esther, and treated her kindly. He gave her extra attention, extra beauty treatments and assigned seven maids to attend to her alone (**Esther 2:1-9**).

Esther kept her nationality a secret as Mordecai had instructed. The Bible is explicit in the fact that each young woman was prepped for an entire year before being taken to the king's "bed." All of them were taken sexually before for the king would decide if they would move on to the next level of the "king's harem." The Bible said that Esther was taken to the king's bed and the next morning she was brought to the king's harem (**Esther 2:14**). Esther had passed the beauty and physical test of pleasing the king.

How old was Esther when she was taken?

Esther was likely around 14 years old when she was taken to the palace to become queen. This assumption is based on the tradition that only virgins were selected as candidates for the king's wife. **King Ahasuerus (Xerxes) was about 40 and Mordecai (cousin) was 78 years old.**

Mordecai does king Xerxes a solid, but ends up getting on the wrong side of the king's newest "hand of the king." Haman shoots to the top and everyone but Mordecai bows down showing him respect (Esther 3:1-2). Haman was furious and found out that Mordecai was Jewish. This deep bitterness in Haman comes to cause him to not only destroy Mordecai, but obliterate his entire race as well (**Esther 3:3-6**).

Haman's anger turns to genocide.

Haman sets his genocidal plan in motion a year later when he met with king Xerxes and convinces him to approve a huge cash bounty for anyone that helps him murder the entire Jewish population living in Persia (**Esther 3:8-15**). This would all take place on March 7th of the next year. It throws the king's city into chaos.

DIG DEEPER: How many genocides have been attempted to annihilate the Jewish people? 2 – explicitly (Haman's and Hitlers), 4 more are debated: Pharoah, Antiochus IV, Rome, Rhineland massacre and Khmelnytsky uprising. Total 6.

Mordecai turns to Esther to use her influence.

Mordecai and all of the Jews in the kingdom went into mourning. They fasted, wept and dressed in burlap, putting ashes on their heads as sign of deep distress (**Esther 4:1-3**).

Esther finds out that Mordecai is in mourning and sends her top attendant to find out what has happened. Hathach meets with Mordecai, finds out about the genocidal decree and brings a request back with him to Esther.

Mordecai knows the only chance they have is to somehow get word to the king about Haman's true intent and think about the amount of loss it would cause Xerxes. Mordecai asks Esther to risk her life to do something that would mean death.

Mordecai asked Esther to go to the king and beg for mercy, pleading for her people.

Esther send word back about how foolish this would be! **“everyone knows that anyone** who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter.” And, by the way, **“the king has not called for me for a month” (Esther 4:10-12).**

Esther knows how things work and even if she were to use her womanly ways to have a little “pillow talk” with the king, he has not asked for a visit in a while – **IT WON'T WORK.**

Mordecai doesn't let up and tell her the palace will not protect her from what is coming, someone will find out who you really are, and you'll die like the rest of our people.

Mordecai basically tells he understands, and maybe another deliverer will come (which did finally happen in Jesus), but in the meantime, she and all your relatives will die.

Mordecai asks the famous question.

Then he delivers the famous question – **“who know if perhaps you were made queen for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:15-17)**

Esther was probably in her late teens, early twenties when she sought and audience with the king without his request to see her. Esther calls for prayer and fasting a second time, but becomes more resolute in her decision, saying, “though it is against the law, I will go and see the king. If I must die, I must die”



Esther courageously steps off the cliff of her calling!

You can read the rest of the story in Esther 5 when she goes in bold and beautiful before the king. The bible says, **“When he saw Queen Esther standing there in the inner court, he welcomed her and held out the gold scepter to her. So Esther approached and touched the end of the scepter” (Esther 5:2)**

Where were you at 14, 20 or 28 years old? It puts a perspective not only on how young Esther was but how her short span of 14 years had such an impact on a million Jewish people living in Persia.

It is likely that Esther was assassinated along with the king and her cousin Mordecai when she was 28 years old.

Did Esther have children? Yes, Queen Esther had a son named Darius, who later became King Darius II. He was raised to be favorable to the Jewish people and played a role in the rebuilding of the Second Temple.

What do we learn from Esther's calling?

- God did not ask her to step off – her cousin did.
- **Esther struggled with her identity** – as an orphan? a Jew? a woman? She believed she was more like a commoner than the queen.
- **Esther also underestimated her character and her value as a leader in her own right.** She was described as being “admired by everyone,” And, Xerxes loved her more than any other young woman, he was delighted with her. Esther had saved the king's life by passing on Mordecai's warning. Why else would Xerxes say, “Now tell me what you really want. What is your request? I will give it to you, even if it is half the kingdom!” (Esther 5:6). Mordecai saw something. Hegai saw something. Shaashgaz saw something.
- **How is it that everyone but us clearly sees the hand of God on our life** and is just waiting to cheer us on to saying YES.

Well, if Esther saw herself as next to NOTHING, this next Biblical character saw himself as above SOMETHING.



Paul's STORY:

Paul's story picks up quickly in Acts 9.

Saul is Hebrew/Paul is Greek. From birth he went by Saul, which means “asked for,” because back in the day, the people of Israel begged for their own king.

God gave them what they asked for in king Saul. When he began his ministry to Gentiles he used his Greek name – Paul.

There is something strange about that connection isn't there? Saul belonged to a powerful sect of Judaism called the Pharisees. A Pharisee was known for strict adherence to the Law and oral traditions. Saul would be the kind of religious leader that the elite Sanhedrin wanted.

Saul was trained by the best of the best - the renowned Jewish teacher Gamaliel in Jerusalem. Saul, later Paul The Apostle Paul was often referred to as "**a Pharisee of Pharisees**," highlighting his own strict adherence to Pharisaic traditions and laws.

Saul was breathing righteous anger

Saul had righteous indignation on his mind when Luke said he “uttered threats with every breath.” This man was **obsessed** with capturing the Jesus people and dragging them back to Jerusalem in **chains (Acts 9:1-2)**.

As he was approaching Damascus, with signed letters going out ahead of him, he had something spectacularly humiliating happen to him.

Jesus drops Saul with a question.

Luke says suddenly a light from heaven shone down around him, Saul fell to the ground and there in the dust of the trail he hears a voice, “Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?” (**Acts 9:3-4**). Whoa.

Saul asks, “who are you, Lord?” One of the top men serving on the Jewish Sanhedrin, working for God, does not recognize this supernatural moment from his own boss’ voice!

The voice says, “**I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting! Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do (Acts 9:5-6).**”

Saul’s breath went from uttering threats to complete and utter silence!

Saul got up, but when he opened his eyes, he was blind (Acts 9:8).

Do you know why God blinded Saul? Because God was showing him that he had been blind all along!

God sets the stage for change.

Instead of riding in high and haughty, ready to serve some justice on these Christians, Saul had to be led by the hand into Damascus. He was fierce and feared until Jesus arrested him. Now he was humbled, blind and clueless of what his future held.

Saul had to wrestle with his calling – not to a **high** position, but one that was very **low**.

This is why Paul later told the church in 1 Corinthians 2:4, “And my message and my preaching were very plain. Rather than using clever and persuasive speeches, I relied only on the power of the Holy Spirit.”

God spoke to Ananias in a vision giving him specific instructions to go where Saul was staying. When God told Ananias to ask for Saul of Tarsus, Ananias hesitated and informed God of Saul's **now former** reputation. (**Acts 9:10-15**).

But Saul was longer the same and he would never be the guy he used to be going forward. God chose Saul to take the message of the gospel to the Gentiles, and to kings, and to the people of Israel. God told Ananias that he would show Saul how much he must suffer for His name's sake.

Ananias prayed with Saul that he would regain his sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit. After Saul got his eyesight back, he got up and was baptized. (**Acts 9:17-18**)

Luke records that Saul stayed in Damascus for a few days and **immediately** began preaching about Jesus in the synagogues **declaring** that Jesus is indeed the son of God.

Application.

- **Esther is lifted in both status and courage, creating a defining moment of sparing the people of Israel living in Persia.** God never called Esther to be the linchpin of salvation for her people, but Mordecai's question really caused her to declare her neutrality in whether she lives or dies – **she would still do what is right!**
- **Saul is lowered into the dirt, instantly losing his sight and his status. God even humiliates him – confronting Saul with an undeniable truth in an unforgettable experience with Jesus.** Saul's calling was clear and came with extraordinary suffering. The unique thing about Saul's calling also came through a life-changing question – **SAUL, SAUL! Why are you persecuting me?** Finding out that he had been persecuting the very God he was committed to represent must have **broken him**.

What would God have of us today?

We would love to pray with you if you are asking God for direction, purpose or calling. Maybe like me, it took several times of hearing that invitation to respond.

- Don't let your past identity cloud your ability to see God's perspective on what He sees in you.

- Don't worry about what others might think about you in this moment, respond only to the prompting of the Holy Spirit.
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SCRIPTURES

Esther 1:5-9

Esther 1:17-22

Esther 2:1-9

Esther 2:14

Esther 3:3-6

Esther 3:8-15

Esther 4:1-3

Esther 4:10-12

Esther 4:15-17

Esther 5:2

Esther 4:13-14

Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

Acts 9

Acts 9:10-15

Acts 9:17-18

Acts 9:1-2

Meanwhile, **Saul was uttering threats with every breath and was eager to kill the Lord's followers.** So he went to the high priest. He requested letters addressed to the synagogues in Damascus, asking for their cooperation in the arrest of any followers of the Way he found there. **He wanted to bring them—both men and women—back to Jerusalem in chains.**

Acts 9:3-4

As he was approaching Damascus on this mission, a light from heaven suddenly shone down around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, **"Saul! Saul! Why are you persecuting me?"**

Acts 9:5

"Who are you, lord?" Saul asked. And the voice replied, **"I am Jesus, the one you are persecuting!"**

Acts 9:6

“Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do.”

Acts 9:8

“Saul picked himself up off the ground, but when he opened his eyes he was blind. So his companions led him by the hand to Damascus.”

NOTES



5 Things About Esther That Nobody Talks About

1. She was exiled. Esther and a significant number of the Jewish people lived scattered throughout Persia after the Babylonian exile. Although they had been granted freedom to return to their homeland, many of the Jewish people stayed where they had settled rather than return to a war-torn Jerusalem.

2. She was orphaned. According to Scripture, Esther had no parents. She had lost both her father and her mother and was raised by her older cousin, Mordecai (Esther 2:7).

3. She was kidnapped. The Persian king, Xerxes (a.k.a. Ahasuerus), was displeased with his wife and sought her replacement. So, naturally, he made a decree in order to gather to himself all suitable virgins in the region.

When the king's edict had been proclaimed, young women were gathered in the citadel of Susa and placed in the custody of Hegai. From the language of the text and our knowledge of the culture, we can safely assume Esther didn't have much say in the matters that unfolded. She most likely didn't raise her hand excitedly, rush to the front of the line, and volunteer for the harem. She was young, she was pretty, and she was taken.

4. She was raped. This part comes as a shocker to people—even to those who have read the whole Megillah as part of their yearly Purim celebration. But the Scriptures are pretty clear about what happened.

The virgins, who were likely in their early teens, were escorted to the king, who is said to have been approximately 40 years of age at the time. They were taken one by one to his sleeping quarters. “In the evening, she would go in, and in the morning she would return to the second harem in custody of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch, who was in charge of the concubines” (Esther 2:14).

They didn't return to the other virgins, but instead were added to the number of the king's other concubines (a.k.a. sex slaves without wife status). No other man could ever be their husband, and they never saw the king again unless he was “pleased with them.” In short, the king test-drove all the models before making his purchase, and he “purchased” Esther to replace his former queen.

5. She risked execution. Though this fact about Esther is well known in the telling of

the story, it becomes even more impressive when we take stock of her experiences leading to that moment.

When Mordecai learns of Haman's plot to annihilate all of the Jewish people, he tells Esther to throw herself before the king and beg for mercy. Unfortunately, anyone who approached the king without first being summoned was killed (seems like a chill place)—unless the king was in the mood to extend his scepter and spare their life. What Mordecai was asking her to do could have easily been the last thing she ever did.

She'd already endured so much, but Mordecai said, "Do not think to yourself that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silent at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place, but you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?" (Esther 4:13–14). Hello, Jewish guilt.

Esther chose the selfless and heroic act. She, Mordecai, and the Jewish people fasted and prayed, and when Esther went before the king, he held out his scepter, heard her case, and granted her requests.

Not only did Esther survive a disproportionate amount of horrific hardship that would be enough to unravel the average human, but she also then chose to be an advocate for justice for others. She stood up for her people, and God used her in a powerful way to deliver the Jewish people from obliteration.

God chose a woman who had everything taken from her—her parents, her freedom, her virginity—and put her in a position of power. He used someone who, due to gender, culture, and circumstance, was invisible and uninfluential and made her the pivotal, formidable heroine.

To me, that story of victory makes Purim a celebration of an even greater freedom—one that frees us from anything that threatens to oppress, damage, or diminish us. **God doesn't just promote our survival; He provides for our growth.**



[Esther in the Bible Facts](#)

1. Original name: Hadassah

Esther's original Hebrew name was Hadassah, which means "myrtle." This name reflects the beauty and grace she possessed. The name "Esther" was given to her after she entered the royal court of King Xerxes (Ahasuerus) in Persia. It is thought to be derived from the Persian word "stara," which means "star," highlighting her extraordinary beauty.

2. Raised by her cousin Mordecai

Esther was orphaned at a young age when her parents passed away, leaving her without immediate family. Her older cousin Mordecai took on the responsibility of raising and caring for her as if she were his own daughter. This strong bond between them played a significant role in the events of the story.

3. Chosen as Queen of Persia

Esther's remarkable beauty and charm caught the attention of King Xerxes, who was searching for a new queen after banishing his previous queen, Vashti. In a grand beauty contest or competition, Esther stood out and ultimately won the favor of the king, leading to her becoming the queen of the Persian Empire. This unexpected turn of events placed Esther in a position of significant influence within the kingdom and set the stage for the dramatic events that unfolded in the Book of Esther.

4. Concealed her Jewish identity

Esther, under the guidance of her cousin Mordecai, decided to keep her Jewish heritage a secret while she lived in the royal court of Persia. This decision to conceal her identity was likely due to concerns about potential prejudice or discrimination, as being a foreigner or Jew in the Persian court could be perilous. Esther's ability to keep her background hidden from the king and his officials became a crucial plot point in the story.

5. Mordecai uncovered a plot to assassinate the king

Mordecai was not only Esther's older cousin but also her guardian and protector. He played a significant role in the events of the story by uncovering a plot to assassinate King Xerxes, which he reported to Esther, who then informed the king. Mordecai's loyalty and dedication to Esther, as well as his quick thinking and integrity, earned him the king's gratitude, although he wasn't immediately rewarded.

6. Haman's plot to annihilate the Jews

One of the central conflicts in the Book of Esther revolves around Haman, a high-ranking official in King Xerxes' court. Haman devised a wicked plot to exterminate all the Jews in the Persian Empire due to his personal vendetta against Mordecai, who refused to bow to him. This plot set the stage for the dramatic events of the story, including Esther's courage in approaching the king to intercede on behalf of her people and thwart Haman's plan.

7. Called for a three-day fast and prayer

When Esther learned about Haman's plan to annihilate the Jews, she called upon her fellow Jews in Susa to join her in a three-day fast and prayer. This period of fasting and prayer was a deeply spiritual and solemn preparation for her risky endeavor to approach King Xerxes without an invitation. Esther and the Jewish community sought divine guidance and strength during this time, acknowledging their dependence on God for a favorable outcome.

8. Risked her life to approach King Xerxes

Approaching the king without being summoned was a perilous act that could result in immediate death, as it was against Persian protocol. Esther demonstrated tremendous courage when she decided to go before the king, uninvited, to make her plea for the lives of her people. Her famous words, "If I perish, I perish" (Esther 4:16), reflect her willingness to put her life on the line to save her fellow Jews.



Genocidal attempts on the Jewish people.

- **Undisputed, explicit state plans to annihilate the Jews: at least two.**
 1. Haman's decree in the Persian Empire (Book of Esther), which ordered officials "to destroy, kill, and annihilate all the Jews... in one day." [Bible Hub](#)
 2. Nazi Germany's "Final Solution," the 20th-century, bureaucratized plan to exterminate European Jewry (the Holocaust). [Holocaust Encyclopedia+1](#)
- Strong candidates (scholars' debate whether these meet the legal threshold for genocide):
 - **Pharaoh's infanticide of Hebrew boys in Exodus**—sex-selective killing that many classify as a genocidal act under the modern UN definition ("intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group"). [Bible Gateway](#)[CRC IHL Databases](#)
 - **Antiochus IV (Seleucid Empire)—severe persecution that banned core Jewish practices and led to mass killings** (often framed as cultural-religious eradication rather than total physical annihilation). [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)[Oxford Bibliographies](#)
 - **Rome after the Bar Kokhba revolt (135–136 CE)**—some modern scholars argue Roman reprisals amounted to genocide; others see it as brutal suppression without an explicit intent to destroy the people as such. [Cambridge University Press & Assessment](#)[OpenScholar](#)
- Massacres and pogroms (catastrophic, but not a realm-wide state plan to exterminate all Jews):
 - **Rhineland massacres (1096) during the First Crusade.** [Encyclopedia Britannica](#)[Wikipedia](#)
 - **Khmelnitsky uprising (1648–49)—vast slaughter of Jews in the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth;** intent debated by historians. [Wikipedia](#)

Bottom line

- Minimum (clear, explicit cases): 2—Haman's edict and the Nazi "Final Solution."
- **Including debated ancient cases: historians typically land somewhere around 5–6 major episodes**, depending on whether you count genocidal acts (e.g., Pharaoh), attempts to eradicate Jewish religion and communities (Antiochus), or Rome's reprisals as "genocide" under the modern legal definition.



The Apostle Paul's major hardships

Paul the Apostle faced numerous challenges throughout his ministry. His experiences highlight the struggles and sufferings he endured for the sake of spreading the gospel.

Types of Hardships

Hardship Type	Description
Physical Beatings	Received 39 lashes five times from the Jews.
Imprisonments	Frequently imprisoned for his preaching.
Shipwrecks	Experienced shipwreck three times.
Perils	Faced dangers from rivers, robbers, and his own countrymen.
Calamities	Endured various calamities and hardships.
Sleepless Nights	Often went without sleep due to his travels.
Hunger	Experienced hunger and thirst during missions.

Spiritual and Emotional Struggles

- Endurance: Paul emphasized the importance of patience and endurance through trials.
- Slander and Praise: He faced both dishonor and honor, being treated as an impostor yet remaining true to his mission.

Purpose of Suffering

Paul viewed his sufferings as a means to demonstrate the power of God. He believed that his weaknesses allowed God's strength to shine through, reinforcing the message of the gospel. His hardships were not just personal trials but also a testament to his commitment to his faith and mission.

 **Series Theme:** *The Precipice*

Tagline: *Standing on the edge of fear, purpose, and obedience.*

Each person in Scripture faced a precipice moment—a threshold between comfort and calling, fear and faith. This series invites listeners to identify the edges in their own lives where God may be calling them into deeper purpose.

Key Framing Questions for Each Character

Character	How God Called	Their Response	Key Human Issues
Gideon (Judges 6–7)	Angel of the Lord appears while he's hiding in fear.	Hesitant, doubtful, asks for signs.	Insecurity, fear, feeling unqualified.

Character	How God Called	Their Response	Key Human Issues
Samuel (1 Sam 3)	Audible voice in the night, persistent calling.	Initially confused, then obedient.	Recognizing God's voice, mentorship, attentiveness.
Jonah (Book of Jonah)	Direct command from God.	Runs away in defiance.	Rebellion, discomfort with God's plan, self-preservation.
Naomi (Ruth 1–4)	Not a direct call, but a redirection through loss.	Returns home and opens herself to redemption.	Bitterness, disappointment, identity loss.
Esther (Esther 4)	Providential positioning and challenge from Mordecai.	Courageously steps into risk.	Risk, identity, fear of consequences.
Saul (Paul) (Acts 9)	Blinding encounter with Jesus on the road to Damascus.	Radically transformed and obedient.	Pride, misguided zeal, needing radical change.