

foundations[®] for Middle School



DASI'S JOURNAL

31 Day Devotional for STUDENTS
(based on the story of Esther)



SOUTHLAND
CHURCH

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Requests for information regarding Southland Church's ministry should be addressed to:

Southland Church
190 PTH 52 W
Steinbach, Manitoba, Canada
204.326.9020
info@mysouthland.com

Versions of scripture quotations are noted.

**foundations[®]
for Middle School**

Welcome to...

**foundations[®]
for Middle School**

Dear Student,

This eBook is a tool that we hope will help you to get into the habit of doing regular devotions with Jesus. Now what are devotions? Devotions are simply a time you set aside to spend time with Jesus one-on-one! When you do devotions you pray, read your Bible and listen to God's voice for encouragement and direction in your life. You may already do this, or maybe you don't know where to start. This eBook is a GREAT place to start! Each time you do devotions you will want your Bible, a journal (like a notebook) and a pen!

This month we will be looking at the life of Esther, from a very personal and upfront view...through her eyes. Of course, we can't know for sure what she was thinking or what really happened, but sometimes it's fun to guess! As we look at her fictitious journal entries and what the Bible actually has to say, we will learn much about our own lives as well.

If you have any questions about this booklet or how to do devotions please ask Pastor Amy or Kyle – of course you can email me directly as well! I trust you will grow closer and closer to Jesus this year!

In Him,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Thom Dick', with a long, sweeping underline.

Thom Dick
Pastor of Resource Development
Southland Church

We welcome any ideas you have to make *Foundations for Middle School* better. If you want to offer some feedback or have questions about how to use *Foundations* more effectively talk to the pastor in your ministry area or email Pastor Thom at thom@mysouthland.com.

Foundations for Middle School is also available for download at www.therenewedfamily.com.

foundations[®]
for Middle School

Memory Verses

*For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God.
And I say to you, ‘Don’t be afraid. I am here to help you.’*

Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other’s faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

Don’t copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God’s will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect.

Romans 12:2 (NLT)

DAY ONE: Read Esther 2:5-7

JOURNAL ENTRY

I hardly slept last night. There was this ominous expectation hanging over me. Something important will happen soon, maybe even today. I can feel it! It's about time I have some change in my life, for it's as boring as ever.

I have no suitors, for though many handsome young Jewish gentlemen seek me out, Cousin Mordecai firmly believes that the right man has yet to knock on our door. As I said...boring!

Cousin Mordecai...why does he get to sit in on court intrigue, write scrolls for the great King Ahasuerus?! Why can't I kneel on a Persian rug in the ornamented court and write till my fingers are numb?

Every day, the same cleaning, weaving and selling cloth in the marketplace. Why can't I have something different in my life, something new and exciting? It's coming soon. I know it is! I mean, sheesh, I'm seventeen! Shouldn't I have a life by now?!

Sometimes I can't help but dream of what it would be like to live in a marble palace, schmoozing ambassadors and accepting beautiful gifts from faraway lands. I wonder what it would be like to be queen.

THINK ON IT

I wonder if Hadassah longed for a change (Hadassah was Esther's Hebrew name). Maybe she dreamt of a luxurious life of court intrigue and riches. Of course, she might have been perfectly happy with her life too! We don't know, the Bible doesn't really say. But do you feel that way, even a bit? Is life in general seeming to be a boring old rerun? Are you grasping for your chance at adventure and change?

God wants us to seek His Kingdom, not earthly riches and temporary happiness. Seeking adventure and change alone will never satisfy you, for God is the only one who can fill the hole in our hearts. Instead of sinking into self-pity and an attitude of selfishness, we can look at the world around us and thank God for the special people and purposes He has put in our lives.

There are so many beautiful things God has created that make life amazing! We don't need to be rich or above anyone else to enjoy a summer breeze or a chat with a good friend, for example.

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 65:12-13
- Romans 2:7

PRAY

Tell God what and who you're thankful for. It can be your cell leader, your favourite season, your best friend, a hobby, etc. Now ask God to help you stay thankful for all His gifts. We should be thankful every day, and even if it doesn't feel natural and sincere at first, God can change that in us and eventually we cannot help but praise God!

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.' **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY TWO: Read Esther 2:2-4

JOURNAL ENTRY

Cousin Mordecai is very stressed. He stormed into the house yesterday evening and shouted, "King Ahasuerus is seeking a bride! We can expect his soldiers any hour! Quick, Dasi, where shall we hide you?"

The thought of being gathered as a potential bride still triggers butterflies in my stomach, a blend of fear and excitement. Imagine! A queen, a bride of a king! Now was my chance to be all I ever wanted. But fear still courses through my veins at the thought of being alone with strangers in a huge marble palace. In fact, I'm afraid enough to throw up. Cousin Mordecai is already home. He came home ashen and afraid, "Dasi! Did you go to market today?"

I responded cautiously, "Yes, of course..."

He groaned and ran his hands through his hair, "There were scouts...spies planted in the streets of Susa to take note of maidens ahead of time. They will come to take you tonight!"

Then chills raced through me as I remembered being watched oddly by a tall, handsome man earlier that afternoon. What am I going to do? It's all happening so fast! Cousin Mordecai has made me promise to keep my Jewish heritage a secret, and then he has commanded me to pray. Only God can give peace at a time like this!

THINK ON IT

I wonder if Dasi is confused about the sudden chaos. Is she excited? Or is she afraid? Again, the Bible doesn't give any details about that, but certainly in our story, Cousin Mordecai was right to tell her to pray!

Even though we don't deserve it, God loves us and wants to help us when we're afraid. Even if God doesn't take away all your fear, He's always there for you.

Keeping God's Word in our hearts is a very powerful way to resist evil and grow stronger in our walk with God!

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 1:1-2

PRAY

Spend a few minutes thanking God. He is our comforter, and He dries our tears or weeps with us. He will never abandon us, and He certainly deserves our thanks!

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, ‘Don’t be afraid. I am here to help you.’ **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY THREE: Read Esther 2:8

JOURNAL ENTRY

My heart is in stormy chaos. Earlier this evening the handsome bearded man who had stalked me yesterday rode on a pale horse, holding a hissing torch aloft, and hundreds of soldiers spread out through Susa.

As I was just locking the outer courtyard gate, having heard screams echoing into the night, torchlight flashed in my eyes and a soldier grabbed my arm and dragged me kicking and screaming into the street. It pains me deeply to write that I don’t remember Cousin Mordecai coming to my aide at all.

The mounted man, watched with sad but cold eyes from atop his tall stallion. Apparently I am weak and useless, for not a single blow of mine made my captor loosen his grip even slightly.

Girls all around me, some my friends, were dragged into the center of the street, wailing for rescue and sobbing in fear. I knelt on the cold, rough cobblestone, my captor standing behind me and the tall man high on his horse before me (I later found out his name was Hegai). My black hair draped like a curtain on either side of my face, and I saw nothing but the hooves before me and shadows beyond as I bent forward, cold and alone in this sea of people. I am weeping just remembering those events of two hours ago. I must sleep, so I will recount the rest some other night. I write this from the harem of King Ahasuerus. My heart aches wondering where Cousin Mordecai’s was when I needed him most. I turn to God for hope.

THINK ON IT

Chaos. Who knew that Esther’s wish for adventure would end in chaos, heartache and betrayal.

God alone knows what we will go through and if we hold His hand down the path designed for us, our eternal ending will be magnificent, even if the path

itself is riddled with pain and turmoil. It doesn't matter where we're at or what battle we face, God will always be at our side if we seek and obey Him.

If we only focus on the lack of control on our lives, like how Hadassah was just thrown into confusion and unfamiliar changes, we will become hopeless and despairing. But if we look to God and trust Him as the all-powerful Creator that He is, we can view our turmoil and struggles with hope and peace.

FURTHER READING

- Ephesians 1:18-22

PRAY

Choose one of the following prayers:

1. Pray and ask God to give you a deeper trust in Him so you can tackle your problems with Him. Then ask Him if there's anything He wants to say to you. Be still before Him and write down anything you sense Him saying.
2. Spend some time praying for an unchanging faith in God and strength in Him that will keep you close to His heart and keep your love for God strong in times of trouble.

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.' **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY FOUR

JOURNAL ENTRY

Last night the walk to the palace was like walking in a nightmare. We were herded into the middle, then the soldiers made a tight formation around us. I walked with head high, shoulders back and eyes on the palace. Tears flowed from my eyes and my sight was blurry.

When we were inside the courtyard, torches blazing, we all collapsed on the dewy grass in a huddled mass. The pain of Cousin Mordecai's silence is more than I can bear, and by the desperate weeping of some of the girls, I know they were left to face it alone as well. They shouldn't have to face it alone. No one should.

As soon as Hegai stopped talking, I took a deep breath and stood, turning to speak to all the girls. "Perhaps one of us will be queen soon, and as such, we should not allow these men to treat us like criminals." With my heart hammering, I forced myself to face Hegai. His eyebrows were raised in surprise. Remembering the fear in the room, I knew I had to defend these girls: "I believe, sir, that you are...are painting a rather bleak picture of the months of

imprisonment to come. If I may be so bold, may I inquire if this is how the King wants his subjects treated, driven like cattle, shivering in the dark?"

Hegai said nothing for a few long seconds, and I was sure he was going to throw me out of the palace. I bowed my head and sat back down, my cheeks burning. Then his voice echoed in the courtyard, "Come here. What is your name, girl?"

My mouth went dry. I quickly picked a name, careful to hide my Jewish heritage. "E...Esther, sir." All too soon he stood looming over me, his sharp green eyes boring into mine. "Follow that guard over there, he will lead you to your quarters."

THINK ON IT

When you read through the whole story of Esther, you get the idea that she would be the type who would step out to help those suffering like she was. We can only imagine that her boldness was something like this. And she was right: her actions could have gotten her disciplined.

It sounds like she has a lot to be thankful for. Courage, strength, beauty, dignity. Even if you're going through a lot of hard stuff, we can still thank God for His blessings.

God is always with us, even when things go crazy, and there are always things to be thankful for. Remember that you can tell Jesus everything that's going on in your life

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 100:3-5

PRAY

Ask God how you can be thankful and see the beauty of His blessings in your life, then ask Him how you can bless someone else today.

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.' **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY FIVE: Read Esther 2:9-10

JOURNAL ENTRY

I awoke under silken sheets on a plush Persian bed. Curtains hung daintily cutting off sections of rooms from the others. The bed was ridiculously comfortable and I hardly wanted to leave it. Suddenly, one of my seven maids, Firi, fluttered into the room with a dress draped over her arm. She was like a

fragile flower, with big, sad, dark eyes. "Miss Esther, it is time you rise from your slumber so that we can prepare you for the day."

I sighed and slipped out of bed. Firi draped me in blue and silver silk, then pulled up a stool. I sat down and she brushed my long thick hair before piling it atop my head, holding it in place with silver pins. Xina, the oldest of my maids, sauntered past the thinly veiled doorway with a tray of delicious smelling food, her thick, curly hair bursting from under a circlet on her brow.

Firi dipped a tiny brush into a pot of silver eye paint. I was told to close my eyes and I felt the cold colour being swiped on my eyelids. Keeping my eyes closed so that the eye paint could dry, I waited patiently, listening to her actions. I heard her sharpen something, then sharp kohl traced my eyes and eyebrows, then I felt a brush paint my lips. Firi hummed the whole time and I hear harp music. She must have seen my questioning frown, for Firi quickly explained. "It is Sera, your musical servant." And with that Firi sang liltily along with the harp, using no words but instead telling a story with her beautiful, emotion-filled notes.

Soon I felt a dry brush dusting over most of my face. She explained before I had the chance to ask, "It is silver glitter, mistress." She then dusted rose golden blush over my cheeks.

Afterwards, I ate a breakfast of cold lamb, sweet rolls and wine. I wonder if I'll have to live with this routine for the rest of my life...I think it could get boring.

THINK ON IT

Hadassah has entered a life of luxurious riches and posh pampering. But I wonder if she thought that it could be boring after a while. We may dream of an elevated life, but as humans we cannot be satisfied without God. We'll always want more and we can never be happy. Thankfully, Jesus gives us peace and joy without us having to become rich in the eyes of others!

We need to put our treasure in God, who is everlasting. Life in Him is far more valuable than any kingdom, any amount of riches or any wish come true.

Besides, when we pursue riches and dreams out of selfishness, we often stop caring about others. God wants us to love others like ourselves because when we get carried away with our own selfishness, we hurt and reject others.

FURTHER READING

- Philippians 2:3-4
- 1 Peter 1:24-25

PRAY

Ask God if there is any selfishness in your heart, confess it, then ask him to help you remember to put others first.

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, ‘Don’t be afraid. I am here to help you.’ Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)

DAY SIX: Read Esther 2:11

JOURNAL ENTRY

It's hard to believe that I once lived in a small stone villa, and yet it's difficult to accept that I now live in a marble palace. As I mentioned several months ago, I have seven maids. Their names are Firi, Xina, Sera, Vinra, Lian, Mira, and Via. They all wear simple white dresses with different coloured sashes. Most of them are a year or two younger than me, but they walk through the palace with an icy grace; I have yet to master that attitude of power..

Everywhere I go at least two come with me and every day one goes to the gate and gives a report on my doings to Cousin Mordecai. It warms my heart that he cares, but it still stabs my heart like a barbed dart every time I think of the night of my capture.

I've been given a more advanced education than the other girls and Hegai has been teaching me privately on how to be queen. I must learn to walk, talk, and react with authoritative serenity like a queen. I must learn the history of Persian wars, the acts of the kings and court etiquette. In addition to all this, they are trying to teach me, to my surprise, how to lie without being caught. “Diplomatic lying,” Hegai calls it. I don't like it.

The numbers of the other girls contending for queen have been significantly reduced with only a few dozen left of the previous hundreds. Those of us still here will remain in the palace for life with one of us anointed queen and the rest as new concubines.

THINK ON IT

We can imagine that lessons, beauty treatments and homework would have occupied Hadassah's time, but even busyness can't wipe away the hurt of betrayal. It still hurts her heart when she thinks of Cousin Mordecai. Yet even though, in our version of the story, Hadassah has no idea why Cousin Mordecai was not there to help her in her time of need, still she is allowing the hurt to fester in her heart. Have you been hurt recently? Are you letting that hurt and bitterness poison your heart? It's easy to allow bitterness into your heart. When we do this, anger melts down our image of the person who hurt us and hammers it into a new, cruel, harsh image.

We have sinned as well and God has so graciously forgiven us that we surely should forgive others.

Being hurt and sad isn't a sin; it becomes a sin when we let bitterness and resentfulness replace hurt. Or it becomes sinful when we hold on to that hurt and don't give it to God. We can lift our hurt and sorrow to God, and He will hold our hearts with tenderness and love.

FURTHER READING

- Matthew 6:14-15
- Colossians 3:12-17

PRAY

Ask God if you're letting bitterness poison your heart. Confess whatever He shows you, then pray that God would help you forgive the other person.

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.' **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY SEVEN: Read Esther 2:10-11

JOURNAL ENTRY

There is so much excitement happening that it makes me very tired, which then makes me homesick; so I suggested that Firi go find Mordecai and bring him to my room. But after discussing it we decided it would be a bad idea. They finally agreed that a few of us would dress as maids and try to run into him as he left the palace for the night.

My maids hurried to help me change into one of Xina's extra dresses. Then we all adorned thin, simple hair veils that maids wore outside of the harem. Firi found water vases in a storeroom and we balanced them on our heads. I trusted Xina and Firi the most, so I left them behind to cover for me if Hegai showed up. The rest of us hurried through the servant halls. We exited into the outer courtyard with Sera leading the way. Servants with torches escorted courtiers to the gates where many climbed on to horses or into litters and rode in luxury to their estates. We strode confidently to the huge marble fountain then around the side and out of the torchlight holding our veils up with one hand so that it covered our faces up to our eyes. No one noticed that I didn't have a jug. With a small wave to my maids, I slipped into the shadows and skirted the courtyard, looking for Mordecai.

I was ducking behind a trimmed bush when I saw Mordecai just a few feet away, walking towards the gate. I glanced around before giving a short, quiet whistle.

It was the whistle my maids used to get his attention when he waited at the gate. He jerked his head towards me, then subtly strode over to where I was

hiding. I guided him deeper into shadows, then threw my arms around him. "Cousin Mordecai!"

He embraced me tightly, whispering in his low voice, "How I have missed you, my girl!"

THINK ON IT

Hadassah missed Mordecai – after all, simply writing letters and passing messages isn't nearly as precious as seeing someone face-to-face. Is there someone you really miss? Friends, cousins, siblings, parents? Who have you been separated from that you love dearly?

If you have been reunited with the person you miss, spend some time thanking God. If you have not been reunited, ask God what you can be thankful for about the situation and its outcome.

If you can't think of anything, think about how we are waiting for Christ to return. Even creation is longing for His return; the earth awaits her King.

FURTHER READING

- Revelation 20:3-7
- Revelation 22:7

PRAY

Ask Jesus to show you one big thing that you can expect when He returns to earth as King. Spend some time thanking Him for that.

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.' **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY EIGHT

JOURNAL ENTRY

Mordecai and I embraced for some time with me weeping into his cloak. When we pulled apart I rose on my tiptoes and kissed him on the cheek. He smiled, eyes shining with tears. He cupped my chin in his muscular but wrinkled hand whispering, "Oh my dear, how I have missed you!"

I could only choke out a sob in reply. After a few minutes of trying to compose myself I begged, "I need your counsel, Cousin. What shall I do about the king? Any time now I shall be sent for. How do I keep my heritage a secret? And what about our Jewish food laws and festivals and...oh Cousin Mordecai, I can't hide everything for my whole life! There is no longer a chance of me being sent home...I'll have to stay as a concubine forever! How can I survive?"

Cousin Mordecai nodded, hands on my shoulders. "Hide it as long as you can, and if he discovers, he discovers. But do not let it become common knowledge, for being a Jew is dangerous. He is a good king. I think he shall treat you well when you are queen."

I huffed, not sure whether I should be embarrassed or flattered, "Why does everyone think he shall choose me?!"

Cousin Mordecai smiled, chuckling, "Because I know both of you. I know that there is no way that you two can be in the same palace and not find each other and fall in love."

The thought made me blush. I had heard he was handsome...

We bid each other farewell and parted.

THINK ON IT

Hadassah wisely seeks someone who she can trust for godly counsel. God wants that for all of us.

It is important to seek guidance from those who are older and more experienced in life and faith. God put wise people in our lives for a purpose, so we should definitely seek their help when we need it.

Do you have someone older than you who you can go to if you have questions or if you just need to talk? A parent, sibling, cell leader?

FURTHER READING

- Proverbs 19:20
- Proverbs 20:18

PRAY

Ask God to show you who you should go to when the need arises, then thank Him for the wise and mature people in your life and pray for them.

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.' **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY NINE

JOURNAL ENTRY

I shall now tell you about what happened on the way back to my chambers: Because it is safer at night, I and my servants strode through the wide open, well-lit halls of the harem, where no man but the king and his eunuchs may enter and live. As we were hurrying through a marble-tiled room with a gentle fountain, an ornate oak door at the other end swung open and a handsome dark man strode into the room.

We all pulled our veils up to conceal our faces. He saw us and strode slowly towards us. He smiled faintly and addressed me. I quickly realized that he had assumed that I was the leader as I am the tallest and carried no water jar. He looked into my eyes. "Have you seen Hegai recently?"

I answered quietly, staring into his beautiful brown eyes, "I have not, sir."

He nodded and turned to leave then faced me again with a puzzled frown, "What are six maids doing in the empty harem halls at midnight?"

I blinked. "We went to fetch water with colourful fishes in it from the courtyard fountains for the candidates."

He nodded. I broke eye contact just as the door opened again. In strode Hegai.

He approached and gave a slight bow to the man who had just spoken to us. That is when I realized that I was speaking to the king!

THINK ON IT

Hadassah sure seems to have gotten herself into trouble...lying tends to do that. Even though this particular encounter with the king is not found in the Bible we know that the dangers of lying is clearly laid out there - there is no telling the disasters that lying can get you in.

But how do we get out of this trouble? We must apologize and ask for forgiveness then not do it again, even though it might be hard to only tell the truth.

FURTHER READING

- Proverbs 13:3
- Proverbs 6:2-5

PRAY

Ask God to show you if you have told a lie lately. God will show you. When He shows you, confess it to Him! If lying is a habit for you, ask God what you can do to keep yourself from lying. Maybe write a warning for yourself on your hand or remember that lying hurts other people. Maybe you need to apologize to the person you lied to or confess this to someone you can trust so they can keep you accountable.

MEMORIZE

For I hold you by your right hand – I, the Lord your God. And I say to you, 'Don't be afraid. I am here to help you.' **Isaiah 41:13 (NLT)**

DAY TEN

JOURNAL ENTRY

I slept fitfully that night and haven't slept well since. That was five days ago. Exhaustion is catching up to me, but it can't defeat the stress that keeps me awake. I am afraid. At any time the king could walk through the harem without warning and he would surely recognize me and see that I am a candidate, not a servant.

This morning Hegai entered my chambers saying, "I cannot believe you, foolish girl! You could have been discovered! You need not try to get yourself killed! You didn't need to find that scribe, Mordecai, despite how well you say you know him! Do you hear me?! Do not ever exit the harem again without my permission!" His cold green eyes flashed in anger.

I stumbled backwards from the aggressive rebuke, my eyes wide as my heart dropped into my stomach. Most of my maids scurried out of the room, but Firi and Xina stepped forward addressing him, "My lord, we will help carry the punishment for we all agreed to the plan!"

He growled as his eyes flashed in fury, "Leave, daughters of nothing! This is not your battle, though you wage it bravely!"

Firi and Xina left quietly but their glares were shameless and loud in the silence. I took a deep breath, "I needed to see Mordecai. He is a dear friend of mine. It had been eleven months since I had spoken with him last and I missed him with my whole heart. I am not sorry for putting myself in danger, but I am sorry for putting the girls in danger."

Hegai shook his head slowly in awe and frustration. "You will make a formidable, but reckless and stubborn, queen."

I frowned, my cheeks burning hotly. "How can you know that he will choose me? There are far more beautiful candidates, are there not?"

He snorted, "I have known my king for ten years; believe me when I tell you that he desires a mystery maiden with spirit far more than a simple bejeweled lady."

THINK ON IT

Hadassah is shocked by Hegai's anger. Seeing Mordecai was an absolute priority to her (this is true in the actual Bible account as well), so in our version of the story she rushed into it and didn't think that it could be dangerous. Imagine if the king had known that she was only pretending to be a servant? Lying to the king is a capital offence.

When we act rashly we should expect a rebuke. God loves us enough to discipline and rebuke us. Is there something you've done that has hurt someone else? Instead of defending yourself or walking away, why not apologize and listen to wisdom? God wants us to keep the peace between us

and others; as such it is cowardly and relationship-breaking if we don't apologize and try to mend the hurt.

FURTHER READING

- Ephesians 4:2-3
- Proverbs 17:10

PRAY

Ask the Holy Spirit to show you one thing that you've done wrong in the last while, where, instead of confessing it, you have defended yourself and covered it up. Bring it to God and honestly confess and repent of it!

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY ELEVEN: Read Esther 2:13-14

JOURNAL ENTRY

I worry. Candidates have started entering the king's palace one at a time and coming out in the morning under the care of the eunuch Shaashgaz in the second harem. The king meets them one at a time and sooner or later I will be called. Hegai assures me that the king has no idea that I am a candidate. This can't settle my nerves.

What if he sees me some time in the harem? I can hardly make myself look any different. I must simply trust God to keep me safe till I am summoned. Cousin Mordecai stills speaks with my maids every dawn by the harem gates. He knows that my time is coming as well as I do, though perhaps for me it is more real and intense. Hegai has told me that he will try to influence when I will be called, so that I have plenty of time to prepare...and pray.

I have been told that the candidates who visit the king may wear any jewelry or special outfits that they choose. I am nervous about what to wear; maybe I shall ask Hegai. He will know what the king likes, after all. Still, my nerves are unsettled and every time a servant enters my chambers I am afraid they bring tidings of my summoning.

I am fasting and praying, for I fear that once the king is aware of my deception I shall be killed. Deceiving a king is punishable by death and it's hard to believe that he will have mercy on me. As beautiful and intriguing as Hegai says the king will find me, I fear that it will not spare me any trouble. I have confessed it to the Lord with a weeping heart, knowing it may be my undoing.

Wait, Hegai has just entered. His face is grave. I fear I may not live to write again. Lord help me!

THINK ON IT

In the actual Bible account, Hadassah had not encountered the king nor lied to anyone other than keeping her Jewish heritage a secret. However, in our version of her story, she did meet him and did lie about herself to him. If that is the case, then Hadassah has done the right things here: Firstly, she threw herself before God and begged for forgiveness with true sorrow in her heart; secondly, she pleaded for help with fasting and prayer, seeking God. God loves us, and though He allows us to suffer the earthly consequences of our actions, a repentant heart saves us from eternal punishment.

When we worry, we are telling God that we think we know better than Him. We must trust Him, for doesn't He know best? He created us! He knows all that is happening to you and will be with you as you go through difficulties and seek His help.

FURTHER READING

- Matthew 6:25-27

PRAY

What is something that you keep worrying about? Tell God about it. Be sincere. He wants to take care of you and give you rest in your heart, but you must let go of your worries. Confess them to Him as sin because that is what worry is.

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY TWELVE: Read Esther 2:15-16

JOURNAL ENTRY

Oh I must recount the events of last night! Hegai entered, as I wrote yesterday and said, "Esther, your time has come. In one hour it will be your turn to go see the king. Hurry and gather your servants!"

I still remember how my heart dropped into my stomach, fear flurrying through me as my maids scurried to the ornate chest Hegai's attendants had set down on the floor. They threw open the lid and searched through it, inspecting beautiful silken gown after gown.

I met Hegai's eyes as he backed out of the room. I heard myself say faintly, "Wait. What will impress the king?"

He smiled, "That chest only contains that which he will appreciate. Choose wisely, daughter of Susa." Then he and his attendants left.

I stood numbly as Sera and Via selected an outfit and began to prepare me for my meeting. I sank down onto my knees, praying desperately as Xina combed my long, thick hair. Firi painted my eyelids with soft silver and my lips with red. She traced my eyes with inky black kohl.

I felt peace as gentle and consoling as a summer breeze as I rose, lifted my chin, squared my shoulders and strode out of the doors.

THINK ON IT

Hadassah prayed desperately as her time came. She was adorned with beautiful clothes and cosmetics, praying that she would impress the king and not make him angry. But though she is worried and anxious, she knows that God is with her always. As she faces her fate she feels His peace and love.

Whenever we are anxious or hurt or confused, God is ready to pull us into His loving embrace and comfort us, even if it takes some seeking to get to that place. God wants to comfort us, we need only to seek Him. God also wants to be the strength in our weakness. When we are lacking, He is not. When we are weak, He is strong. When we are failing, He is succeeding.

FURTHER READING

- Matthew 11:28-29
- Isaiah 41:10

PRAY

Think of a time when you were worried or scared. Now quiet yourself and ask Jesus to show you where He was in that memory. Thank Him for what He shows you.

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY THIRTEEN

JOURNAL ENTRY

Hegai met me on the other side of my doors. He guided me, torch aloft, through the maze of side halls in the direction of the king's chambers. With

every step I embraced the peace that God gave me, for surely He walked before me. I remembered how He had protected Daniel in the lion's den and from many other dangers while in this very empire. It was also consoling to think of David and how God had protected him from death over and over again, never abandoning him.

My bare feet were chilled from the marble floor, but I paid no attention. My mind and heart was focused on God and the little part that was not was focused on the king.

After what felt like a year but also like a second we arrived at the door to his chambers. Butterflies danced in my stomach. I turned to Hegai. "Thank you for every minute you invested in me. I pray that I will not fail you."

The doors were opened by the guards on either side of us. I again composed myself with the poise and grace of a queen and moved into the room, my bare feet making no noise and the skirt of my gown trailing behind me almost silently. I closed my eyes for a moment and breathed, perhaps for one of the last times.

When I opened them I took in my surroundings. Scarlet and white curtains hung gracefully from different areas of the ceiling creating a roomy, fairy-like chamber. I could see that the room curved to the right. I cautiously stepped through the room while a cool night breeze from high windows stirred the translucent curtains all around me. I turned the corner just as the door beside me opened.

THINK ON IT

It's the moment of truth! The night that has the chance of changing everything! She will either leave this fateful meeting with the king as the most powerful woman in an empire that stretches from Egypt all the way to India, or she will be not much better than a slave for the rest of her life. As she awaits the meeting that will determine her fate, Hadassah senses God's presence and it fills her with praise. She knows that God is with her no matter what.

What does praise look like for you? Do you like to sing, paint, dance, draw or write for God's glory? Maybe you just like to sit in His presence and pray. That is also a wonderful way to grow closer to God.

Ask God if there is something specific that He wants you to be thankful for. If nothing comes to mind, simply look around you. God created the wind, your family, trees, the sky, animals, snow, everything! There is so much that we can be thankful for! Praise God in your own way.

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 150:1-2
- Psalm 46:10

PRAY

Try lying down in a quiet room and just let your mind rest from all its wanderings. Breathe deep. As your heart and mind settles, think about the Psalms you just read. Think about how good God is. Offer quiet praise to Him from your heart. The Bible commands us to *"Be still and know that I am God."* (Psalm 46:10)

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY FOURTEEN: Read Esther 2:16-17a

JOURNAL ENTRY

I whirled around, recognizing the king in an instant. He wore draping white and gold silks. I did not curtsy. I simply stared at him as he stared back at me in silent surprise. Then he spoke, "Enlighten me. Who are you really? Surely you are not a candidate!" He stepped towards me.

I exhaled slowly, forcing myself to relax further. "I am Esther, my liege."

He did not break eye contact, seemingly mesmerized. "Please, no titles here. Are you candidate, servant, or courtier? I met you as a servant, you carry the authority of a courtier and you come to me now as a candidate?"

I stumbled upon the limits of my promise to Cousin Mordecai; I couldn't speak about us being related lest the king know that Cousin Mordecai, and therefore I, are Jewish. "I wanted to speak with a dear friend of mine. I and all but two of my attendants dressed as handmaidens and left the harem, without Hegai's permission or knowledge."

He inclined his head, then finished for me, "And on the way back you bumped into me. Yet the mixture of fear, courage and regret I now see in your eyes confuses me."

I offered a faint smile, "I had not known you as king for I had never seen you before. Only when Hegai bowed did I realize my mistake. Here I am and I beg for forgiveness."

He smiled. "Then it is given. I enjoy some palace intrigue, don't you?"

I smirked, "Only if it doesn't get me in trouble."

He grinned mischievously, "Ah, but the whole fun of getting in trouble is finding your way out of it. I think we shall get along, you and I. Call me Suerus." I still remember how my heart fluttered when he said that.

THINK ON IT

Hadassah has finally met the king. She tells him honestly what happened and he accepts that and moves on. He seems like a nice man...handsome, adventurous, merciful, and the list goes on. Hadassah is very truly blessed. What should her response be? Giving thanks to God!

FURTHER READING/PRAY

Your prayer time and reading will be combined into one. Don't hurry through this part! Read Psalm 97:1-6, putting all distractions aside (books, phones, etc.). You can meditate by reading it slowly and 'digesting' it, picking apart every verse and thinking about what it means to you. You can also journal whatever pops out to you, thanking God with your thoughts and writing.

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY FIFTEEN: Read Esther 2:17B-18

JOURNAL ENTRY

I have fallen in love with him, and he professes that he loves me back!

I was crowned queen three days ago in the evening. I walked with graceful authority down the aisle, which was covered in white flower petals, to his throne. I was adorned in ivory coloured silks, accented with blushing crimson and delicate gold.

My hair was left to cascade down my back like the night before, threaded with small red flowers. The ten foot train of my dress stretched out behind me. I was barefoot, as I insisted. My lips were coloured red, my face, throat and collarbone dusted with gold, and my eyelids dark with crimson, then accented with gold. The sleeves of my gown fell much like the ones of the night before.

I moved confidently down the aisle glancing at Mordecai on the way. He smiled, joy clear in his face and dark eyes. He made a sign of blessing and I subtly did it back. Then I looked forward again. Hegai stood off to the side and I smiled at him. He smirked, looking smugly satisfied that he was right that I was chosen.

I prayed many prayers of thanks as I slowly made my way to the throne. The flower petals were soft under my feet. I barely acknowledged the singing and cheering of the scribes and courtiers and merchants. To me, it was silent. Silent and beautiful.

Finally I reached the shallow marble stairs to the throne. I ascended them, staring into Ahasuerus's eyes. They were filled with joy. He smiled and I smiled back and glanced at the ground, suddenly shy as I stood before his throne. I knelt as servants swept my train out behind me to drape delicately on the stairs. Suerus stood, golden lion scepter held up in his right hand. He extended it and rested it for a moment on my head then set it aside and picked up the crown from a crimson pillow held by a servant. It was gold, set with many sparkling and light coloured gems. It was heavy, but no heavier than the baskets I balanced on my head in the market.

Finally, he helped me to my feet and I turned to face the crowd. Then he announced in a booming voice, "Persia, your queen!"

THINK ON IT

Hadassah has ascended the ranks of the Persian court from commoner to queen. Who would have thought that she would be chosen? It is easy for us to miss the details in this story because we are familiar with the ending, but imagine how she must have felt! Imagine her exhilaration as Suerus told her that she was the one! God blessed her immensely! There may have been many other emotions that she experienced as well; perhaps fear or regret? Maybe a sense of loss that she could never return to her simpler life? The Bible is unclear about the details, but we can be sure it was NOT boring!

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 65:5-8

PRAY

Listen in prayer and ask God what to be thankful for. Now try something new. For example, if you normally draw, maybe you should sing. If you are more comfortable writing, maybe you should try drawing. If you are natural at prayer, try dancing. God loves it when we try new things to bring Him praise!

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY SIXTEEN: Read Esther 2:19-20

JOURNAL ENTRY

The feasting lasted a long time, with all of the 127 provinces celebrating me and princes and lords bringing me gifts and tribute. I sincerely pray against

pride for I know that it could cripple my heart and make me cruel and arrogant. Yes, it is wonderful wearing such rich dresses and veils with sparkling jewelry and beautiful hairstyles. Again, pride is a threat! I am the wife of the most powerful man in the world; how can I avoid becoming proud? It is difficult! There are two ways I have found that help me be humble: interacting with commoners (and thus being reminded that I was one of them) and looking to God and acknowledging that He brought me to this place.

I love Suerus deeply! He is funny, adventurous, attractive and slow to anger. His personality is so disarming that I felt comfortable telling him that I was dear friends with Mordecai, but that is as far as I can share without breaking my promise. Every time we make eye contact, my stomach flutters, my heart races and I grin and look down like a shy little girl. His gorgeous brown eyes always flash as he smiles. Oh, I love him!

Hegai still counsels me, guiding me through my day and giving me advice about different feasts, meetings and court sessions. Suerus is busy ruling 127 provinces, so I can't really blame him for not teaching me more or spending more time with me.

And I almost forgot to mention this: I selected my seven maids to be my ladies-in-waiting, so they have ascended with me!

THINK ON IT

Hadassah is wise to watch for pride. It is easy to lose our humility when we are raised above others. We were all created equal with none of us below or above anyone else. God placed us where He wants us for His amazing plan. God has established every authority for His purpose, for His glory, all according to His plan. No one can take credit for being in the place God has put them – all people are equal in His sight, so we should see all people as equal too.

FURTHER READING

- Philippians 2:3-11

PRAY

Ask God if there's any pride in your heart then confess this and pray for strategies to watch for pride.

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY SEVENTEEN: Read Esther 2:21-22

JOURNAL ENTRY

Cousin Mordecai overheard that the officers Bigthana and Teresh plan on poisoning my husband! Right now Suerus is in the desert hunting lions, so I secretly sent a messenger to find the hunting party and alert my husband. We had a watch placed on Bigthana and Teresh, but they disappeared without a trace! Worse, the messenger's horse returned alone, bleeding and wounded from a lion attack. I didn't know whether the messenger delivered the warning and got mauled on the way back, or if he was attacked on the way there. So I rode out last night without Hegai's knowledge.

I couldn't bring a procession of guards, for guarded processions are too slow. So I mounted Susa's swiftest horse - a tall, muscular black Arabian horse named Yonder - and escaped the palace, galloping through the desert. I stole riding trousers, a tunic and a black cape. I was barefoot, as usual. The desert was so dark, but the stars and moon were so bright! All I could hear was the thundering of Yonder's hooves. When we were only three or four miles away from the city I heard a lion roaring in the distance to my right. Yonder flattened his ears, but kept running. A chill slithered down my spine as again the lion roared, closer this time, on my right. My mind racing, I begged God for help.

Suddenly it was close, chasing us with snarls. Yonder squealed, bursting into a desperate sprint for survival. We were going so fast that I could hardly breathe. I glanced behind me. A glossy, shadowy form ran a few dozen yards behind, yellow eyes flashing. I prayed desperately once more.

Then Yonder tripped on a shadowy ridge in the sand and we went tumbling. Everything went black.

THINK ON IT

In the Bible we are not told how Bigthana and Teresh's plan was discovered and reported, but it is fun to imagine that Queen Esther was willing to come to the aid of her new husband. In our version of the story we wonder: Will she be mauled? Crushed by her horse then dragged away and eaten? We can be assured that God is the overseer of all creation. Can the created outwit or escape the Creator? Of course not. Though God often holds off disaster, He doesn't always do so. His glorious plan far exceeds our short lifetimes. Therefore we can walk away knowing that God has a miraculous, world-redeeming plan whether we live or die in the process.

And when you can trust fully in a God like that then what is death? What is pain? What is sickness and suffering? The Bible tells us that our light and momentary troubles aren't worth comparing to the glory that will be revealed in us (2 Corinthians 4:17). Wow! Imagine that!

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 37:3-7
- 2 Corinthians 4:17

PRAY

Ask God to give you courage about death and suffering, then spend some time thanking Him for loving us so much that He has invited us into heaven.

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY EIGHTEEN: Read Esther 2:21-22

JOURNAL ENTRY

I awoke in an embroidered tent, Suerus holding my hand and a physician hovering about me. When I saw Suerus I wept with joy that he was alive and threw my arms around him though my head pounded and ached. Relief washed over his handsome features and I cried in his arms for some time before I composed myself and asked, "What happened? Is Yonder alive? What about the lion?" The physician had left the tent obviously satisfied with my condition.

He smiled. "We were pursuing the lion that was chasing you and we caught up to see Yonder protecting a collapsed rider, screaming and fighting the lion. I speared the lion then dismounted and came to see who the rider was, for I knew that it must be important if he was riding Yonder. Yonder moved aside, and I flipped over the rider to see his face and behold – It was my queen! The physician said that the fall knocked you unconscious, nothing more."

I laughed with joy and relief, then sobered. He was serious now. "What have you risked your life to tell me, Esther? What is so important that you gambled with your own life?"

I replied, "You are so important! My friend, Mordecai the scribe, overheard that your officers Bigthana and Teresh planned on poisoning you. I sent a messenger, but his horse returned alone and injured. So I told Hegai that I was spending the evening alone, then dressed as a rider and set out. You know the rest."

He shook his head in awe. "You are the most dedicated wife I have ever met. What have I done to deserve you?" Just then we heard the thundering of many horses and Hegai's voice yelling questions and demanding answers. Suerus and I grinned.

THINK ON IT

Again Esther has proven herself strong-willed and loyal, risking her own life to warn Ahasuerus instead of commanding another messenger to be sent. She threw her life on the line to save someone she loves.

FURTHER READING

- Proverbs 31:25-31

PRAY

Like the good wife in this passage, Esther looked after the welfare of her husband. This shows that she truly loves him. But since you're not married yet, ask God how you can interpret this passage into your own life. Does this mean that you should serve your parents above and beyond what they ask? That you should give your worries to God and embrace confidence? That you should work far harder than you are expected to at school? That you should honour your friendships and respect other's opinions?

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY NINETEEN: Read Esther 2:23-3:1

JOURNAL ENTRY

Hegai was furious, as I expected, but I think he has begun to forgive me. I apologized much like last time...I am sorry that I endangered Yonder and caused him worry, but I'm not sorry for endangering myself to save my husband.

He stormed out of the room, hot with anger. But today he just shook his head in awe at me. Investigations have been finished and the plans were found to be true. Bigthana and Teresh were hanged this morning. I only attended because I had to, but I did not watch. I think death is terribly sad.

Every day I visit Yonder, for he fought valiantly to protect me at the risk of his own life. He has a few deep cuts on his forelegs from fending off the lion and his ankle is sprained from tripping, but other than that he's doing splendid!

He nickers and bangs the stall door every time he sees me and it melts my heart! Suerus allowed me to make him my personal royal mount. As soon as Yonder is healed Suerus and I will go riding through the richer (and safer) streets of Susa with an armed guard. I'm excited! Suerus rides a steel gray war charger named Blade.

I told Suerus that it was Cousin Mordecai who informed me of the plots against his life and it was recorded in the annals of the king. I hope Cousin Mordecai is rewarded or at least recognized for his actions. Oh, here's some court news...A new man has found favour with Suerus and is now the most powerful noble. His name is Haman. Something about him gives me the chills (maybe it's the cold wildness in his gray eyes). I'm sure it's nothing...

THINK ON IT

Loyalty is such a beautiful quality. Doesn't it make you feel warm inside when you read about Yonder's brave efforts? Aren't animals amazing? God has created so many amazing, wild, beautiful creatures.

Dogs are known for their loyalty and bravery; cats for their icy grace and cold pride; fish for their flashing colours; and horses for their beauty, wildness and speed. It is foolish to think that everything simply popped into being. Look at dolphins and whales...could nothing form into the ability to locate objects by sonar? Look at the lion...could chemical reactions give the males a mane of fur to protect their throats in a fight? Look at the horses...could astronomical accidents give them their blazing colours and frightening speed? It's silly, really.

FURTHER READING

- Read Job 39:19-30 and marvel at the descriptions God has given a few of His many creatures.

PRAY

Ask God to give you eyes to see the beauty and stunning majesty of His creation and go for a prayer walk if the weather permits. If it's too cold, look out your window and admire creation, thanking God.

MEMORIZE

Always be humble and gentle. Be patient with each other, making allowance for each other's faults because of your love. Make every effort to keep yourselves united in the Spirit, binding yourselves together with peace.

Ephesians 4:2-3 (NLT)

DAY TWENTY: Read Esther 3:2-15

JOURNAL ENTRY

I can't explain or communicate my horror and distress! Earlier today Suerus allowed Haman, that new noble, to arrange our fate! He wants all Jews dead! We are to be massacred!

I learnt this terrible truth from Cousin Mordecai. I assume Suerus didn't tell me because he didn't want to 'worry my tender heart' as he says. Cousin

Mordecai feels awful, for he says that he refused to bow to Haman and now Haman wants every Jew killed! I don't know what to do! I cannot go to Suerus without being summoned...not even to his chambers. Any visit or date is instigated by him, or I will be killed for breaking protocol. And besides, he doesn't want to see me...he hasn't sent for me in thirty days.

I am fasting and praying, as is Cousin Mordecai and most of the Jews in Susa. In fact, they are wearing sackcloth and ashes, mourning and wailing in the streets, which I would do, but it would give away my race. Oh, God, attend us now! Soon women, children and men alike will be destroyed and their possessions taken for the Persian crown!

Oh, if only Suerus knew my race, for then he would surely defy the idea of the massacre. But now his royal signet ring has been used to make this decree and I fear our fate is sealed.

Where are You, Lord? Help us! Guide me and direct me as my life and the lives of the rest of Your chosen people are threatened. Do not abandon us! Do not leave us in the dust! You are our only hope.

THINK ON IT

Fear-stricken, Hadassah feels like her world is crumbling. The situation is out of control and desperate prayers and wailings rise to God from the people of God. David, too, fled from terror and persecution. Jesus understands our suffering. He loves us more than life itself and He proved it when He died on the cross so that we could join Him in heaven.

Whenever we are in deep distress we can turn to God and He will guide our steps. God tells us to not worry because His glorious plans are in mind and He has the power to twist any terrible situation to His wonderful will!

FURTHER READING

- Hebrews 13:5-6
- Romans 8:28

PRAY

Ask God to give you courage and strength in Him for when trouble comes.

MEMORIZE

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:2 (NLT)***

DAY TWENTY-ONE: Read Esther 4:1-17

JOURNAL ENTRY

It is thirty days since I have been summoned by Suerus as he is so busy with court issues with Greece. Cousin Mordecai sits in torn clothes and ashes at the palace gate. I cannot go see him, but I sent one of my trusted eunuchs to ask him if he wants palace clothes, though I knew he would refuse. He did refuse, but also sent the eunuch back to inform me that I must go before the king and beg for mercy and plead for our lives.

Surely I cannot! He doesn't want to see me in his chambers and going before the court would mean my death! I sent back this response and he answered back, "Do not think that because you are in the king's house that 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?"

His words hit me to the heart. I risked my life and rode through the desert alone to save Suerus. I risked my life pretending to be a servant and escaping the harem to speak to Cousin Mordecai. Surely I am not too cowardly to risk my life in the throne hall of a king to save a nation! I have asked Cousin Mordecai and all the Jews to fast and pray for me for three days and nights, as I and my maids are doing. On the fourth morning I will go before the king of Persia, and if I perish, I perish.

I fear I may not live to go on that ride through Susa with Suerus. By this time in four days, I may be dead.

THINK ON IT

Hadassah has chosen to once again risk her life for those she loves. We, too, must pick up our cross and carry it for His name, for His glorious plan. There is no death or suffering more noble or great than that which comes through serving God. Hadassah will lay down her life for her people, God's people.

Mordecai is right. If she will not speak, then another will, but she will perish, for in staying silent she is refusing to carry her cross. Though tragedy and danger are real, God is so much more real and He has a plan for all of our troubles. We need not panic or stand still out of fear. We must act under God's will and guidance.

FURTHER READING

- Matthew 16:24-26

PRAY

Ask God to show you an area in your life where you're not carrying your cross. Maybe you follow along with the popular group because you're afraid to stand out as a Christian. Or maybe you're not carrying your cross by not giving God any attention all week and just acknowledging Him at church. Maybe when your friends are being rude or inappropriate, you don't say anything and simply laugh with them. Confess whatever God shows you and ask for the strength from Him to stand out or make a commitment in your relationship with God.

MEMORIZE

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NLT)

DAY TWENTY-TWO: Read Esther 5:1-2

JOURNAL ENTRY

This morning I lived, though I should have died.

This morning I donned rich white and crimson silks, the colours of purity and blood. I refused makeup; the king and the court must see me as I am, desperate, eyes flashing in fear and tears flowing.

I left my hair down, kicked aside shoes and strode through servant halls to get to the throne room. I knew that if I took a predictable route then Hegai would find me and stop me. I wound my way around the palace, my maids back in my chambers, praying and fasting. I prayed the entire way, tears streaming down my face, chin up, shoulders back, eyes proud but surrendered. I reached the throne room and the huge oaken doors were swung open, welcoming me into death. I strode slowly down the aisle, not looking to my left or right, keeping my wet eyes on the blurry form of my husband, who, in this moment, was my executioner. The doors closed behind me with a boom.

The guards on the king's platform drew their swords to kill me if I ascended the marble steps. I could not look at Cousin Mordecai or I would burst into sobs and fall into his arms. I kept walking, my eyes not leaving the king, though guards came forward to kill me and nobles stood, yelling about my rebellious act, which has broken the strongest protocol, and trying desperately to get a reaction from the king. He frowned, then rose to his feet as I began to ascend the steps. As my bare foot landed on the first step, the guards stepped forward to finish me. Second step. Out of the corner of my vision I saw the guards raise their swords to crash them down and split my skull.

I didn't care. I climbed the last step and sank to my knees before my king and husband, just as he extended the golden scepter. Relief washed through me, but that was before I saw that a blade was arcing down towards me from the right.

I did not duck, or look away from the king. I closed my eyes, waiting for the killing blow. But I heard a grunt and a gasp and the clatter of a fallen sword and my eyes flew open. I looked away from the king to see Hegai standing over the rebel guard, the guard's sword on the ground, Hegai twisting the guard's wrist to breaking point. Finally my fear caught up with me and as Suerus pulled me onto the throne with him, I wept desperately.

THINK ON IT

Hadassah risked her life to save her people. Was she calm as she did this? Or was she an emotional wreck? We don't know, the Bible seems to paint a very calm Esther approaching the king – but we can surely guess that she was very nervous! Yet, she took God's strength and wrapped it around herself like a cloak and faced certain death. But God saw her situation and He knew the desperation that fueled her. He knew that her people, His chosen ones, were threatened. So He saved her, through Ahasuerus, and now she has a chance to redeem her people. What will she say to the king? Is it wise to accuse Haman in front of so many nobles who might agree with Haman's treatment of the Jews? And even the king approved of the edict that sealed their death.

Just like Queen Esther did, we can trust God and His good plans, knowing He is altogether far wiser and greater than we could ever be.

FURTHER READING

- Romans 8:18

MEMORIZE

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:2 (NLT)***

DAY TWENTY-THREE: Read Esther 5:3-5

JOURNAL ENTRY

I slowly composed myself, then sat up in Suerus's arms and met his worried brown eyes with mine. He looked fair panicked. "Esther, what is so important that you again risked your life to tell me? Esther, what is your request? Even if you ask for half the kingdom, you know I'll give it to you."

I gave him a ghost of a smile. "...I would like to invite you and Haman to a banquet I have prepared. I will tell you my request then."

He frowned. "I like the idea of the banquet, but..."

"Please, Suerus...I can't say it here."

So he agreed and I left, legs weak and hands shaking. Hegai grasped my arm and helped me leave through a side door of the court. Hegai shook his head

fiercely, gripping my arm almost a little too hard. "You foolish woman! When will you stop throwing yourself at death?!"

I stopped in the hall, causing him to stop too. I searched his eyes. They were afraid and relieved. He wasn't truly angry, just panicked by my antics. I smiled. "Hegai, as long as people I love are threatened, I will be throwing myself at God's feet, and if I perish, I perish."

He shook his head in awe. I smiled again and kept walking, his arm dropping from my arm, till he jogged to catch up. "You must prepare for the banquet. What is it you need to say to the king?"

I sighed, glancing at him and giving no response. We reached my chambers. I entered and prepared for the evening as servants rushed back and forth, preparing my small, pretty private garden for the banquet. I adorned gold and silver silks, my hair curled perfectly and my face decorated. My feet bare, I again left my praying maids and strode through the halls, this time to the banquet.

THINK ON IT

Hadassah is preparing to finally say her request, to beg for the lives of her people. God has been with her so far, why should she fear now? God's got her back. As long as we follow Him wholeheartedly, He will never abandon us. Never. Even if we die, that means that we get to live in paradise with Him forever. What an amazing life, huh! On earth we can trust Him to guide us and work for us, and in death we are with Him for eternity. Spend some time thanking God for His love that we do not deserve, but yet He loves to give it!

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 62:5-8.

PRAY

Ask God how you can apply this Psalm to your life. Write whatever you receive down then and ask God for help in remembering to do what He asks.

MEMORIZE

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:2 (NLT)***

DAY TWENTY-FOUR: Read Esther 5:5b-8

JOURNAL ENTRY

I strode down the marble-tiled path. Tall torches were stationed along the wide path, casting odd shadows as the fire flickered. Beautiful, colourful exotic flowers looked eerie in the wavering light. I stopped when I reached the low oak

table. It sat in the middle of a tiled circle. Three silk, embroidered pillows waited around the table. I turned, my skirts twisting beautifully, and faced the gate to the garden, awaiting my banquet guests.

The gate swung open and King Ahasuerus entered regally, adorned in silks, but not wearing his crown. Haman followed behind, also dressed richly. They reached the table. I curtsied to the king and Haman bowed to me. Then we were all seated. I had no appetite to eat and simply watched the men with wary eyes. When they were finished eating and drinking wine, Suerus again asked me for my request.

I cleared my throat, my tongue feeling thick and numb and my heart hammering as I glanced at Haman. I felt sick to my stomach looking into Suerus' hopeful eyes. He probably thought I was going to announce that I am with child or something of that sort. How could I say this before my enemy, Haman? What might Haman do to me if he knows I am a Jew, later, when Suerus and Hegai aren't around to protect me? What if they mock me or don't believe me? What if Suerus doesn't love me anymore?

I opened my mouth to speak, then closed it again. I felt like a failure as I heard myself say, "My petition and request is that your majesty and Haman come to another banquet, tomorrow night." Haman looked smug that he was so favoured. Suerus narrowed his eyes. He knew there was something breathtakingly important under my tongue, something I couldn't find the courage to say. But he slowly nodded in assent, though his eyes warned me that next time he wouldn't let me stay silent.

I wept quietly as they left the garden, inwardly kicking myself for my cowardice and begging God for forgiveness.

THINK ON IT

We don't exactly know why Hadassah didn't confront Haman's crimes in the first banquet. Maybe she was scared, maybe she needed more time. Either way, God used the extra day in an incredible way (as you will see). No doubt Esther was afraid, but what she did took a lot of courage and strength and we know from the Bible that she was looking to God.

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 56:8-11

PRAY

Can you think about a time when it seemed like you had failed or maybe like God wasn't at work? How did it turn out? Take a moment and ask God to show you one way He worked things out for good, even though things didn't seem good at first.

MEMORIZE

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NLT)

DAY TWENTY-FIVE: Read Esther 7:1-6

JOURNAL ENTRY

The next morning I arose early and prayed and fasted for hours, until I was too weak to stand. Then Xina and Firi insisted I eat something. I do not pray for myself very much...more just that the king would listen and do everything he can to save us. I know that he cannot cancel the edict, since his signet ring was used, but surely he can alter it or add to it!

My maids prepared me and the banquet all afternoon. I adorned a blood red dress, which is sometimes seen as the colour of those who are condemned to die. My eyes were painted white, accenting with the red sash around my waist. Finally all was ready and I entered the garden. Everything looked the same as yesterday, except the moon was fuller. I stood as I had the night before, awaiting my guests.

The king and Haman arrived shortly, arrayed in silks and finery as I was. We greeted one another and then we were seated. My king looked tired and weary, like he had not slept and Haman looked flushed and bitter. I wondered, but did not ponder on it. After they were done eating and were drinking wine, Suerus asked, "Esther, what is your request?"

I squeezed my hands in my lap. My heart hammered. I took a deep breath, then stood and knelt before him. I think I said, "My king, if I have found favour with you at all, let my wish be my life and the survival of my people. If we had simply been sold as slaves then I would not burden you further, my king, but we are sold for destruction."

Suerus flashed to his feet, anger flickering in his brown eyes. "Who is he who dared do this?"

I slowly lifted my hand and pointed my finger at Haman, keeping eye contact with Suerus. Realization dawned on him and his eyes grew wide, "You...you are a Jew!"

THINK ON IT

Hadassah has done as she was asked. She asked for the lives of her people, but what will be the result? Suerus could let the slaughter happen or he could try to save her. But Jews weren't favoured in ancient Persia. He must be disappointed and confused that his wife and queen was a Jew. Hadassah knows that her place as queen is now threatened. Who wants a Jewish queen? Not

many. But God has held her hand the whole time, in accordance with His beautiful plans and love and mercy for us.

FURTHER READING

- Jeremiah 29:11-14

PRAY

Pray Jeremiah 29:11 as a prayer for our government and our country – God has good plans for Canada, not plans for disaster. Ask Him to bring about His good plans.

MEMORIZE

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NLT)

DAY TWENTY-SIX: Read Esther 7:7-10

JOURNAL ENTRY

Suerus looked shocked. He moved slowly out of the circle of light. Fear slithered through me. I didn't like the idea of being alone with Haman. He stood and I quickly stood as well. I moved and sat back on my low, backless couch.

Haman came over, fear in his eyes. He knelt before me. "Please, I meant you no harm! I did not know you were a Jew, my queen. I never meant to offend you! Please save me from the king's wrath."

I turned my face away from him because I knew that if I helped him he would simply return to his wickedness. He stood and I glanced at him cautiously. He took another step and I stiffened a second before Haman's foot caught on the edge of the couch and he tumbled forward. I squealed and jerked away, hopping out of the couch and darting a few feet away. Suddenly Suerus was at my side, hauling Haman up and shoving him to the ground, snarling, "Will you even assault the queen in my presence, in my house?!"

Hegai stepped out of the shadows on my right, making me jump. I whispered, "You were there the whole time?!"

He smirked, then turned to Suerus bowing, "Majesty, Haman has recently set up a gallows to hang Mordecai, who saved your life and whom you favoured."

Suerus stiffened. "He dares hang one whom I have favoured? Hang him on it."

Hegai hauled the fainted Haman out of the banquet. Suerus turned to me slowly. Then he pulled me into his arms and I wept for some time. I managed a simple, "He tripped." Suerus laughed.

THINK ON IT

Things are starting to work out! Haman is dealt with and there is peace between Suerus and Hadassah; and in this there is hope for the Jews. God saw Hadassah through all of this: Every moment, every conversation and every new development or threat. God is helping Hadassah save her people, His people. Hadassah grasped the courage of the Lord and put her life at stake and made a strong, direct effort to save her nation.

FURTHER READING

- Joshua 1:6-9

PRAY

Spend some time praying for your school, teachers and classmates (etc.).

MEMORIZE

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NLT)

DAY TWENTY-SEVEN: Read Esther 8:3-6

JOURNAL ENTRY

My hand was relaxed in the crook of Suerus' arm, but my heart was far from relaxed. We were walking down a pretty garden path on our slow winding way to the gate where we would meet Cousin Mordecai. Suddenly I took a deep breath and stopped. Suerus turned to face me with a puzzled frown.

I sank to my knees, tears stinging my eyes, "Suerus, I again plead for my life and the life of my people. I thank you that you have dealt with Haman, but our destruction is still sealed. Please, is there nothing you can do?"

To my surprise, he knelt, facing me and taking both my hands in one of his. With his other hand he stroked stray hair away from my face. "Esther, what part of me wants your death and the death of your people? I will do all I can. Surely you know that."

We sat there together for some time, me weeping into his fine tunic, dirt smudges on my skirts. He whispered in my ear, "At least your shoes can't be soiled."

I choked on a laugh. He knew I never wore shoes.

Finally we drew apart, while I continued sniffing.

He smiled. "Esther, I would like to give you the whole of Haman's wealth and lands, to the very last leaf and candlestick."

I gave him a watery smile. "Thank you, Suerus, but can I give it to my Cousin Mordecai?"

He smiled. "Of course. Come, he is probably awaiting us already."

He rose, then helped me up. I brushed off my ruined skirt. He snickered, "Your maids will not be impressed."

THINK ON IT

Hadassah has once again thrown herself before the king and begged for the lives of her people. She knows that the edict can only be added to, but not cancelled out. But there is hope.

If we persevere in God's will, fighting desperately for His Kingdom, then we will be blessed in heaven. There is always hope. As long as we worship God there is hope. He constructed the universe. Surely one law of protocol and the power of one signet ring cannot tip the scales and ruin God's plans.

FURTHER READING

- Hebrews 10:35-36
- Jeremiah 32:17-22

PRAY

Ask God to help you to have a more worshipful attitude so that you can further appreciate His glory and splendor.

MEMORIZE

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:2 (NLT)***

DAY TWENTY-EIGHT: Read Esther 8:1-2

JOURNAL ENTRY

He finished his story as we walked down the garden path, "...and so Haman had to lead the scribe Mordecai, his enemy, through the streets proclaiming, 'This is what is done to him who the king delights to honour.'"

I laughed. Life was easier now with Haman gone. I found it hilarious that Haman was publicly humiliated on the afternoon of the banquet. I grinned.

Suerus frowned. "Where was Mordecai going to meet us again?"

I pointed down the path at the gate where a shadowed form stood on the other side, "There he is."

We approached and I threw the gate open flinging myself into Cousin Mordecai's arms. He and I embraced as he patted my back, allowing me to weep into his tunic. I could hear Suerus chuckling. I drew back from Cousin Mordecai, stepping aside as he bowed to Suerus. Suerus smiled. "Finally we

meet face to face. I must thank you for raising Hadassah, saving my life and for encouraging Hadassah to speak up and share her secret with me."

Cousin Mordecai inclined his head, "And I thank you, sire, for listening to Hadassah's plea and for treating her like a flower...though she's not near as obedient or predictable as a flower!"

I rolled my eyes, making both men laugh.

I then turned to my cousin, "Cousin Mordecai, I hereby give you all of Haman's lands and wealth."

Cousin Mordecai was struck speechless. Suerus added, "And I am giving you Haman's place of authority in the court, as well as my signet ring." He took off his glittering ring of power and gave it to the surprised old man. "Th-thank you, both of you. I can only hope that God will use my high position to help His people as He did with yours, Hadassah."

THINK ON IT

Finally Hadassah's two favourite men meet! The two men who have been involved in shaping her into who she is, though God did most of the work.

FURTHER READING

- Psalm 33:13-22

PRAY

Ask God how you can apply this joyful Psalm to your life. Do you need to change your attitude? Do you need to be more grateful and worshipful? Or maybe God wants you to put more thanksgiving into your daily devotions? Thank God for speaking and spend some time writing down people, opportunities, and things that you are grateful for. Pray the list back to Him in thankful praise. Then ask how you can remember to be grateful for the blessings around you. Maybe you need to write a note on your mirror or make it a regular practice every time you see someone you love or notice something beautiful.

MEMORIZE

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:2 (NLT)***

DAY TWENTY-NINE: Read Esther 8:9-17

JOURNAL ENTRY

Yesterday it was decided how we are to be saved! Thank You, Lord! Suerus directed Cousin Mordecai to add to the edict of our destruction. It states that on

the day of our destruction every Jew has the right to take up weapons and protect themselves and their families and they get the land and wealth of anyone who attacks them and fails. Some people now pretend to be Jews, because Jews are so favoured!

This wonderful message was sent out into all the provinces on the swiftest horses, including the sons of our royal stallions, Yonder and Blade.

Cousin Mordecai is now the second most powerful man in the Persian Empire, second only to my husband. Oh, how life is becoming lovely! I get to see Cousin Mordecai every day in court and he even dines with us regularly, along with Hegai (who, by the way, has been elected the head of the guard). All my maids now worship the one true God as does Hegai. Suerus is harder to convince, since he was raised from birth to worship the many Persian gods. But God will win his heart someday, I hope. I will always keep praying.

I have made a strong effort to meet and befriend all the ladies of the court. Many times I have accompanied Suerus on his visits to various estates so that I may speak with the women and encourage them. Several have even shown curiosity in the Jewish faith! Besides all this, three of my maids, Xina, Firi, and Sera, have found young, handsome guards to flirt with...Suerus' guards! Suerus and I often joke about our servants and their attachments to each other.

Life is good! I thank the Lord for every moment of it! Oh, He is amazing! Despite how busy I am, I still make time every night to worship Him and pray to Him. Lately I am giving Him many, many thanks for the blessings He has showered on us since I obeyed His command and went into the throne room at the risk of my own life. He is truly a wonderful God, our loving Creator.

THINK ON IT

God surely has worked miracles in Hadassah's life! He has orchestrated it so that she saved the Jews from certain death plus doing wonderful miracles in other parts of her life, like showing Himself to many of her friends and companions. From the Biblical account we can only imagine how Hadassah and Mordecai would have used their influence to sway others to worship of the one true God – in our retelling we get an idea of how they might have done so!

As has been said countless times, God has a plan for our lives. Even if His plan includes hardship and persecution remember that God is always there to suffer through it with you, to cheer you on and show you His love. Also remember that greater suffering for God's name here on earth will result in greater blessings and honours in heaven. God does not forget those who have suffered for Him.

Though some who have suffered for God have received blessings soon after in this life, such as Hadassah, not all of us will. But do not lose sight of our goal! The greatest riches on earth are simply incomparable to the glory of living in God's full presence in heaven.

FURTHER READING

- Deuteronomy 4:29-31
- Isaiah 57:1-2

MEMORIZE

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:2 (NLT)***

DAY THIRTY

JOURNAL ENTRY

We went on our ride through the streets as Suerus promised. We brought Cousin Mordecai and Hegai for fun. They chatted behind us as Suerus and I rode beside each other in the front. Cousin Mordecai rode his beautiful white mare, a daughter of Blade. She was fast and strong, but was used mostly for show. Her name was Rose. Hegai rode a totally black gelding, who strongly resembled Yonder, his father. He has a wonderful horse, perfect for a head guardsman.

The lower nobles and merchants who live on those streets crowded everywhere we went marveling at all of us. I made sure to smile at the women encouragingly. I want every woman, no matter her social status, to know that God loves her and that she is valued.

We wound through the curving, twisting streets, stopping to visit with many courtiers and nobles who we bumped into. By the time we were riding back to the palace it was almost dark and just for fun we rode home a more difficult way to annoy the guards.

All of us, except Hegai, liked the idea of playing a prank on the over-protective guards. It had almost taken bribes to stop them from coming along with us in the first place.

Hegai opposed these ideas, but his eyes glittered with repressed mischief and his mouth twitched with a slight smile. Suerus and I shared a look, grinning. We kicked our stallions, leaving the other two in the dust.

After a few good-natured races between the four of us, we finally returned to the palace exhausted and happy, laughing at the greatly relieved faces of the formerly-panicked guards.

THINK ON IT

God loves it when we experience joy and fun! Hadassah and Suerus are crafting a lovely relationship that will last for years to come!

FURTHER READING

- 1 Corinthians 4:4-7

PRAY

Ask God to point out which parts of love are most natural for you. Then ask Him to reveal which parts are the hardest. How does He want you to practice love this week?

MEMORIZE

Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. Romans 12:2 (NLT)

DAY THIRTY-ONE: Read Esther 9-10

JOURNAL ENTRY

Months have passed, dear journal. Everything is splendid. God is so good!

Yesterday the Jews were all supposed to die...but few did! Instead, over five hundred of our enemies were killed, just in Susa, for crossing swords with the Jews! Their deaths were sad, but were nevertheless the fault of the attackers. Some nobles even helped protect the Jews, arming and fighting with them because of their fear of Cousin Mordecai's increasing power! The ten sons of Haman were killed in the melee as well. I have mixed feelings about their deaths. The Jews, however, retained their honour and never took plunder from their attackers, instead being satisfied with the victory God gave them.

At the moment all us Jews are feasting and celebrating, giving glory to God for our survival. These days of blessing from the Lord will be celebrated annually. Cousin Mordecai and I are calling it Purim, which means 'casting of the lots', for Haman cast lots to see which day he would try (and fail!) to destroy us. Cousin Mordecai wrote it up and made the annual feast and holiday official. I then signed it and confirmed it. Now we will celebrate every year, for generations and generations!

On another note, Firi and Xina are betrothed to young guards and Sera is married! I allowed them to leave my services, but they all refused. After her honeymoon is over, Sera will continue serving me during the day and return to her new husband in the evening. Firi and Xina are fiercely dedicated to me and both scorn the idea of retiring from being my maids simply because they will soon wed.

Suerus and I love each other far more than I thought possible. We often go for rides when he is not too busy with politics, decrees and ambassadors. Cousin Mordecai often takes over the signing of documents and the making of decrees so that Suerus and I can go on rides, both in the desert and in the streets. We

almost always bring Hegai...almost. We have managed to escape without him a few times. At the very least Hegai should be grateful that I haven't come close to dying recently!

Oh, how I love how God has transformed my life! All glory is, without doubt, due to Him! So never stop praising or loving Him, for He is beyond our wildest dreams! This is the end of my journal. If something new and exciting occurs I might take up journaling again, but until then, farewell.

Queen-Esther Hadassah

THINK ON IT

God has carried Hadassah through a crazy journey these past 31 days of journals! From marrying a king to being attacked by a lion, Hadassah has hardly had a normal life. But where in the Bible does God promise us a “normal” life? The peace and joy in our hearts that we get from following God far exceeds the struggles of this life or the trials we might battle through.

God is good, always. Thank Him for going on this journey with us this past month, then recite your verses to a cell leader or parent when you have the chance.

PRAY

Make a list of the best two or three lessons that you have learned in your life so far. Ask Him to remind you of them and then write them down in your journal. Take a few minutes to thank God for each one of these important lessons that you have learned.

MEMORIZE

*Don't copy the behavior and customs of this world, but let God transform you into a new person by changing the way you think. Then you will learn to know God's will for you, which is good and pleasing and perfect. **Romans 12:2 (NLT)***