Esther: The Role of a Lifetime

A Bible Study for Teen Girls

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Table of Contents

Introduction . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 6
Chapter 1: One Man's Haste . . . . . . . . . 9
Chapter 2: It Was Just an Ordinary Day . . 21
Chapter 3: Standing Alone . . . . . . . . . . 35
Chapter 4: A Place in the Plan . . . . . . . . 49
Chapter 5: Behind the Scenes . . . . . . . . 59
Chapter 6: Finding Resolution . . . . . . . . 71
Keys to a Successful Small Group . . . . . . 84
Teaching Plans for Small Groups. . . . . . . 87
About the Author

PAM GIBBS serves as the Youth Minister at Bellevue Baptist Church in Nashville, TN.

Pam is a native Texan who became a Christian at youth camp at age 13. She began working in youth ministry at age 19. She graduated from Wayland Baptist University (where she was a disc jockey and even took a class in roller skating) before getting her Master’s of Divinity degree at Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary.

After moving to Nashville, she went on a blind date with a high school teacher and coach named Jim, whom she married in 2002. Jim and Pam adopted a baby girl, Kaitlyn, from Guatemala in 2006. Pam’s other love is chocolate, especially dark chocolate. She also loves to lose herself in a good book or movie and is obsessed with playing games on Facebook®. Pam loves to be on the go and enjoys traveling for work. Her dream is to scuba dive off the Great Barrier Reef in Australia, but she’ll need to learn how to scuba dive first!

Pam’s favorite verse is Psalm 46:10: “Be still, and know that I am God.” And she takes that verse to heart. She has led seminars and written articles about the practice of contemplative prayer and other ways of drawing closer to God, and any one of the women she’s mentored will tell you that she is one of the most genuine Christians you will meet. She’s not afraid to be real, a quality that will hopefully be evident to you as you read this book.

Special Thanks

We would like to thank the following girls for their help in designing this Bible study. You rock!

Bethany Aycock ✴ Ashton Daniel ✴ Lisa Herod
Becca Herod ✴ Hannah Wakefield
This book is dedicated
in loving memory

to
Stephanie Lynn Wright
September 26, 1974 – December 23, 2005

Stephanie was a part of every one of our lives, even those of you who never knew her. To us at LifeWay, she was a beloved friend, coworker, event coordinator, student, teacher, mentor, counselor, and a true worshiper. To you, she was your voice. We really wish you had known our friend Stephanie. Long before any resource had been published for teen girls, she was passionate about our ministry to you because she knew what it was like to be where you are. She understood what it was like to be a young woman seeking the Lord in the midst of a chaotic and crazy world.

On December 23, 2005, Stephanie was involved in a fatal car accident. She was only 31. While we still mourn her absence, it is her life’s touch that we remember so fondly. Stephanie lived a captivating and passionate life. Her life richly blessed so many individuals in many different ways. She was a student who possessed a hunger for studying God’s Word that we all longed for. She was a devoted friend to countless people—investing her time, energy, and wisdom in so many.

Stephanie always closed her letters and e-mails with “In HIS Hands.” In this book, we celebrate and honor the truth that Stephanie is truly in God’s hands.
EVERYONE LOVES A GOOD STORY. WE’RE DRAWN INTO “ONCE UPON A TIME” FOLLOWED BY PASSION, INTRIGUE, CONFLICT, AND DANGER. WE LOVE IT WHEN THE GOOD GUY WINS AND THEY ALL LIVE HAPPILY EVER AFTER. WE GET SWEPT AWAY BY CAR CHASES, LOVE TRIANGLES, MISTAKEN IDENTITY, AND THE TRIUMPH OF GOOD OVER EVIL.

The story of Esther can sweep you away, too (except there’s no car chase). There is a king and queen. There is a good guy (and girl!) and a bad guy. A murder plot. A beauty pageant. You’ll find suspicion. Intrigue. Danger. And a surprise ending.

While this story focuses on Esther, you’ll quickly discover that in some places in the plot, she quietly fades into the background. Like a good storyteller, the writer of Esther wove together the actions and attitudes of many different people. You can learn from all of the characters in one way or another. Some are great models for you to follow. Others are great examples of what NOT to do.
To help you keep track of the characters, check out the diagram at the bottom of this page. You can refer back to it if you forget who’s who.

You’ll also discover there is no mention of God anywhere in this book. Nothing about prayer. Or the Ten Commandments. Or anything else remotely “churchy.” In fact, the Book of Esther was almost excluded from the Bible for that very reason. Keep in mind, though, that just because God’s name isn’t mentioned doesn’t mean that God isn’t present. As you’ll quickly learn, one of the main themes of Esther is God’s providence and His presence in every event. God is silently at work behind the scenes, working out everything to His end and for His glory.

By the end of this study, you’ll be swept up in a story of one woman who chooses the road of courage and action, changing the course of her nation’s history even though she could have been killed. Hopefully, you will see a bit of Esther in yourself, too.
One Man’s Haste
ONE DAY IN HIGH SCHOOL, THE ADMINISTRATION PULLED THE JUNIOR CLASS INTO THE GYM SO THE LOCAL JEWELRY COMPANY COULD DISTRIBUTE INFORMATION ABOUT CLASS RINGS. THE ASSEMBLY WAS BORING, AND I WAS IN A RUSH TO GET OUT OF SCHOOL AND MOVE ONTO SOMETHING MORE IMPORTANT (PROBABLY MY BOYFRIEND).

Thinking I would beat the rush once we were dismissed, I decided to hop down onto the gym floor from a few rows up in the bleachers. In a brilliant display of athletic coordination, my heel caught on a row of seats below me, sending my whole body backwards. The back of my head landed on another row of seats, blinding me momentarily with pain. There I was, half-conscious and splayed out in front of everyone. I instantly became the topic of conversation as the dumb girl who fell. In my haste, I made a very poor decision, and boy, did I pay for it!

What about you? Do you get in a hurry? Take the quiz on the next page to find out.
Quiz: Do You Hurry?

Check out the quiz below to determine whether or not you are a hurry-er! True or False:

1. **T** **F** Thirty minutes is too long to wait for a table at a restaurant.
2. **T** **F** You get irritated if a friend takes too long to text you back.
3. **T** **F** Waiting at red lights drives you crazy.
4. **T** **F** You tend to think through all the alternatives when making decisions.
5. **T** **F** When you shop, you buy the first pair of jeans you like instead of looking around more.
6. **T** **F** You can’t stand commercials when you’re watching TV, so you either change the channel or use your DVR to fast-forward through them.
7. **T** **F** When you finish a test, you turn it in only after you’ve double- and triple-checked your answers.
8. **T** **F** You can recall a bad-hair phase that resulted from a spur-of-the-moment decision you made to cut or dye your hair.
9. **T** **F** You look for the shortest line at the checkout counter and race in front of others to get there first.
10. **T** **F** You prefer to read the novel rather than watch the movie based on it.

You probably gathered that answering “true” to most of these questions revealed a lack of patience on your part. Look specifically at questions 4, 7, and 10. If you answered all three as “False,” then it’s safe to assume that you do things in a hurry. Being quick and efficient is not necessarily a bad thing; sometimes, though, being hasty can cause some real problems, as you’ll discover in this study. But if you answered “true” to questions 4, 7, and 10, it sounds as though you are thorough and patient. And if you have some mixture of answers to those questions, then know you’re not alone in your times of impatience and haste. Wherever you stand on this quiz, take a lesson from the story of Esther. Sometimes we are called to wait patiently; other times, we must act quickly. Wisdom is the key to knowing the difference.

In this chapter, we’ll meet one of the main characters in the story of Esther, a man whose hasty actions set off a chain of events that changed the lives of many people. Let’s meet him now.
May I Introduce . . .
Read Esther 1:1-5.

* Who is mentioned in these first few verses?

* What did the king do?

* Why do you think he held this massive feast?

Meet King Ahasuerus. Ruler from India to Ethiopia. Your Bible may use the name “Xerxes.” Same guy. And there was no more powerful man on the planet at the time. In the third year of his reign (he reigned 21 years total), he gave a banquet. That’s not so unusual. Lots of kings in the ancient world gave banquets and invited the “A list” to attend.

But did you catch how long this party lasted? 180 days. For SIX MONTHS, the king showed off his royal glory and the majesty of his kingdom. And if that weren’t enough, he held another week-long banquet for the people of Susa (where he lived), and invited every person in the kingdom to attend, from the greatest to the least. No one was excluded. Can you imagine how expensive that party must have been? (If you want to read about that party, check out verses 6-9).

* In your own mind, how would you picture this party? Write or draw out your thoughts on the left.
**May I Also Introduce . . .**

At this point in the story, another character enters the picture. Her part is small, but her role is pivotal. Read about her in Esther 1:10-12.

- What new character do we meet?

- What did the king ask her to do?

- How did she respond?

- How do you think she felt?

- Put yourself in the king’s shoes. How do you think he felt?

- How does verse 10 describe him? How might this have contributed to his emotional state?

- If you were the queen, what would you have done, knowing everything that was at stake?

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*(Proverbs 21:5, NIV)*

**The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.**
Meet Queen Vashti. We don’t know much about her because she makes her exit so early in the story. We do know that she gave a banquet for the women in the palace at the same time the king gave his (Esth. 1:9). On the last day of the king’s banquet for the people of Susa, he was “feeling good from the wine.” Translation: he was drunk. In this alcohol-induced euphoria, he decided to show off one more part of his kingdom—his wife in all her beauty! Some scholars think that King Ahasuerus wanted to show off his wife wearing her crown—and nothing else!

We may not know much about Queen Vashti, but we do learn that she was strong. She refused to be paraded around in front of a bunch of men who were probably as drunk as their king. She was strong enough to stand up against wrong being done to her, which would cost her dearly. It could have even cost her life. Luckily, she was spared.

If you think about her situation, it’s not too different from that of many women today. The setting is different but the challenge is the same. Thousands of women will use their bodies to find or keep success, money, or the approval of those around them. They parade their bodies, showing everything off in order to please someone, most often a guy. Unfortunately, they do not have the same courage or self-respect as demonstrated by Queen Vashti. She had everything. Life in the palace. The finest of food, clothes, and jewelry. Servants to wait on her. Maids to clean for her. And she gave it all up to save her dignity.

And Now on Stage
Here’s where the plot takes an interesting turn. The king is stuck. What is he supposed to do now? Read Esther 1:13-22.

* Whom else do we meet in this story?

* Why did the king seek their counsel?
ONE MAN’S HASTE

What were his advisors afraid of?

What mistakes do you think King Ahasuerus made in this story?

How did King Ahasuerus’ hasty decision affect others?

How has a recent decision you made affected others, good or bad?

In these verses we meet the king’s advisors. His cabinet. His right-hand help. His posse. He went to them for advice. The mighty king from the earlier verses couldn’t even get his wife to do what he wanted. The situation was getting out of control, and he didn’t know what to do. If he didn’t respond, word would get around that the king was weak and his own wife wouldn’t listen to him. Who would want to follow the leadership of a king whose own wife rejected his authority? The council of men was equally outraged by Queen Vashti’s defiance against the king. What if their wives followed in Queen Vashti’s footsteps? They would lose total control!

Their solution? Banish Queen Vashti. Get rid of her. Show her the door. And that’s what happened. Because she treasured her dignity more than her position as queen, she kept her dignity and lost her crown. Good choice.
Introducing . . . Esther
So how does the story of the beautiful Queen Vashti and the prideful King Ahasuerus relate to Esther? Esther 2:1-4 tells us. The king’s anger subsided, and he “remembered Vashti.” Some versions of the Bible say that the king had “second thoughts” (The Message) about what he had done to Vashti. When the king cooled off, sobered up, and got his pride back, he began to regret his hasty decision. But his law was irrevocable. There was no way to get Vashti back. The solution? Find a new queen. Goodbye Vashti. Hello Esther. (More about that later!)

But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations.
(Psalm 33:11, NIV)

The point is this: Esther had no idea any of this was going on. At this point in the story, she did not know she would become swept up in a series of events that would change her life, all because a king wanted to show off his wife who wasn’t willing. Esther was probably doing what she’d always done every day. But God, who knows all and sees all, was very much aware of what was happening. And He was working all things together. Later in the story, you’ll discover how God had His hands on the situation for a much larger purpose!

A Lot in Common
Believe it or not, you and I are a lot like King Ahasuerus. OK, you probably don’t run a kingdom, and you probably haven’t ever hosted a feast that lasted several months. But ask yourself this: Have you ever made a decision in haste that you later regretted? Have you ever done something in the heat of the moment that you wish you could go back and change? Have you ever done anything in a hurry and paid the consequences later? Maybe you are a little more like the king than you thought!

One time, I hurried through a science test to just get it done and over with. It was a pretty easy test but I missed a whole back page because I was in such a hurry! I never did it again. — Ashton, age 14
Your Turn

Each of the decisions below can be costly for you and those around you. In each box, write down some consequences you or others have faced because of these decisions.

- Lying
- Drinking
- Divorce
- Gossip
- Suicide
- Cheating
- Premarital sex
- Bullying
- Oral Sex
- Stealing
- Drugs
- Abortion
- Pornography
- Mistreating siblings
- Online deception
What can you learn from King Ahasuerus’ hasty choices?

If he could do it over again, what do you think the king would do differently?

Enthusiasm without knowledge is no good; haste makes mistakes.

Scripture tells us the value of not making harsh and quick responses in the heat of the moment—especially when we’re angry. Nothing good happens. Keep in mind, though, that God is bigger than your mistakes and He can bring about good from the bad. You’ll see that happen over and over again in the next few chapters. God is sovereign and providential over all! In other words, He sees all and knows all. He is working out everything to His end, His plan, and His glory. He is not surprised by anything—even our sinful choices—and is very much in control.

(Proverbs 19:2, NIV)
Your Place in the Story

√ When faced with a choice, I base my decision on...

√ When I’m making a choice, I usually talk to___________ because

√ One choice I need to make soon is ...

√ I can be sure that I make a wise decision and not a hasty or prideful one by...

√ I would say I am like (or not like) King Ahasuerus because …

√ I would say I am like (or not like) Queen Vashti because…

√ King Ahasuerus made some choices based on his own pride and ego, and it got him into trouble. I got in trouble for doing the same thing when I…