



Esther Saves Her People

Goal: To discover ways to turn our faith into action.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In Esther 4-7

Esther, Queen of Persia, is an important figure in Jewish history. She was a Jewish girl, chosen to be the wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I, 486–465 BCE). As queen, Esther foiled a plot to kill the Jewish people. She was able to turn it around against the enemies of the Jews.

Haman, a major official, was offended by Mordecai, Esther's Jewish cousin and her guardian. Haman's resentment against Mordecai and the Jews led him to persuade the king to issue a decree to exterminate all Jews on the thirteenth day of the month. But Esther intervened. Mordecai told her, "Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family" (4:14, CEB). Esther was willing to die with her people (v. 16).

But the tables were turned. Haman was given the death sentence, and the Jews were permitted to defend themselves against their enemies and win victories. This began the Feast of Purim, celebrated by Jewish people to this day.

God's grace was with Esther; even as it was "for a moment like this" that she was able to save her people. Her people remembered her brave actions, with gratitude.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

The story of Esther and her willingness to speak up for her people is still remembered and celebrated in the holiday of Purim. This story, with its many characters and evolving plot, is a great one for children to connect with as they hear it and follow the actions. Just as Jewish children choose one of the characters at Purim, so the children you are teaching can imagine the thoughts of Haman, Mordecai, Esther, and King Ahasuerus to better understand the choices they made. Power, bravery, meanness, wisdom, cruelty—emotions that lead to good and bad choices are all here for children to witness and understand in this story and in their lives.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you prepare to tell the story of Esther, be aware of the uniqueness of this small book in the Bible. Children may be interested to know how remarkable it is to have a story about a woman, and a book of the Bible where God is not mentioned! They might enjoy seeing how God is present in this story through the actions of the characters. Where do they see God's love at work? Where is God's concern for justice, mercy, and kindness evident in the actions of the characters? Where is it missing?

*O God, guide me into new ways to deepen my faith
and to serve you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023-2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i-iv, 12, 17, 22

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

blanket or mats

Guided Play

choice 1: prepared
paper plates, gold
wrapping paper and/or
aluminum foil

choice 2: dress-up
clothes, crowns, capes
or towels

Exploring

choice 1: **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1, paper-plate
puppets from "Guided
Play" choice 1

choice 2: **GN 2**, basket

choice 3: party supplies,
party food

choice 4: copies of **GN 3**

Make a few extra queen
and king paper-plate
puppets in case some
children have time to
make only one or don't
want to make any.

GATHERING IN GOD'S GRACE

Before the Children Arrive

Designate a story corner, and lay out a blanket or individual mats for the children so their backs will be to the door.

Use **SCM i-ii**, "Your Visual Schedule," to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii-iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

Select the activities that will work best for you and for your children. You do not need to do everything suggested!

Before the session, tape large craft sticks to the backs of paper plates. Make enough for each child to have two puppets, with some extras. Cut crown shapes (to fit on the paper plates) out of the gold wrapping paper or aluminum foil.

"Exploring God's Grace" choice 3 requires more prep.

Welcoming and Guided Play



Greet children as they arrive, and say, "Grace and peace be with you." Prompt them to respond, "And also with you."

Be sensitive to any children who might be coming for the first time. Introduce yourself to parents/caregivers whom you do not know personally. Tell the parents that today's story is about Queen Esther and how she saved her people.

Invite the children to choose a guided play activity to start:

1. **Making Queen and King Puppets**—Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about a queen and a king. Invite them to make queen and king puppets from paper plates to use later in the session. Have the children glue a crown to each paper plate and then draw a face for Queen Esther and a face for the king. Save for "Exploring God's Grace" choice 1.
2. **Play Dress Up**—Invite the children to play dress up. Add crowns and capes to allow the children to dress up like kings and queens.
3. **Rhythm Instruments**—Invite the children to try out different rhythm instruments. After they have taken turns trying different instruments, invite the children to choose an instrument. Encourage them to pretend to be in an orchestra and to try to play one of their favorite songs.

T *Transitions can be difficult for children. Do not force reluctant children to join a group activity. Instead, allow them to observe quietly from their own play area or to listen to a story read to them by an adult helper until they are ready to join the group.*



Transitioning to Story Time

B L

When you sense the children are ready to move into group time, call them to the story corner, dancing and listening to “Alabad al Señor (Let Us Give Praise to God)”—**MM 21; SCM 22.**

Celebrate

Have the children stand in pairs, facing each other. Tell the older child in each pair to stay as serious as possible during the game. Tell the younger child in each pair to make the silliest faces, movements, and noises possible. The goal is to make the other child laugh. After a few moments, have the children switch roles.

The King and Queen Speak

Call the children to the story corner by using the following directions:

- ▼ The Queen says, “Clap your hands.”
- ▼ The King says, “Put away what you are doing.”
- ▼ The Queen says, “Turn in a circle.”
- ▼ The King says, “Take giant steps to the story corner.”
- ▼ The Queen says, “Sit down and fold your hands in your lap.”
- ▼ The King says, “Listen to the story.”



Today’s story can be found in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Hearing the Story

C

Open the Bible to Esther so that the children know the story comes from the Bible.

Tell the children that they are going to hear a story about a queen and king from long ago. This brave queen saved her people. Invite the children to listen to the story of Queen Esther.

Read **SCM 12**. Express the emotions of the story in your voice, gestures, and facial expressions. Conclude the story by prompting the children to say, “Amen.”

After reading the story, ask the following questions to check for understanding:

- ▼ Who are the people in the story?
- ▼ What happens first in the story?

Continue asking questions for sequencing the story.



EXPLORING GOD'S GRACE

1. Queen and King Tell the Story

Retell the story using GN 1. Hand out the puppets the children made in “Guided Play” choice 1. Make sure each child has a king and a queen puppet. Tell the children that you are going to tell the story of Queen Esther again.

If you have an assistant, select parts to read so that children know who is speaking. If you are reading alone, hold up puppets to indicate the king's and queen's lines.

Invite the children to have a puppet show by holding up their king or queen puppet when the king or queen speaks. Have the children repeat the phrases in parentheses as you indicate.

Discuss:

- ▼ I wonder, “How did Esther help the Israelite people?”
- ▼ I wonder, “How scary can it be to help other people?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What ways have we tried to help other people?”

2. Queen and King Game



Cut strips from GN 2 and place them in a container. Form two groups. Tell the children that they are going to play a game, pretending to be queens and kings. Tell the first group to do the queen actions and the second group to do the king actions. When an action indicates “the people,” everyone does the motion. Draw a strip of paper and read the action.

Play a few rounds, then switch which group is queens and kings so that all have turns being both.



3. Have a Party



Provide food and drinks, such as crackers, cheese, raw vegetables and dip, fruit, and juice.

Remind the children that, because Queen Esther saved them, the Jewish people had a big party. That is why we celebrate Esther as a brave hero today.

Tell the children that they are going to get their room ready and then have a party. Invite the children to help you decorate with rolls of crepe paper. Let them tape an end to a chair or wall and string the crepe paper around the room. Put on festive music while they are decorating. After the room is decorated, have a party. Play some games the children enjoy.

End the celebration by thanking God that we have examples of faithful people like Esther to teach us how to be brave with God's help.



Use “wonder” questions that do not force a child to remember facts. Wondering questions help a child think aloud. Answers are neither right nor wrong. They help teach children to speak from their hearts.

4. Coloring Page C FM

Hand out copies of **GN 3** and crayons. Invite the children to color the picture. Engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- ▼ I wonder, “What foods did they serve at the party?”
- ▼ I wonder, “What rules would you make if you were the king or queen?”

T *Transitions can be difficult. This may be a good time for some quick physical activities, such as bowing low to the ground, turning in a circle, and waving hands in the air.*

LOVING AND SERVING GOD FA LG

Have the children help clean up the space.

Call the children together, singing “God Is So Good”—**MM 5**; **SCM 17**. Repeat words and phrases as seems appropriate. Ask the children how they will be brave with God’s help.

Invite the children to repeat each line of the following prayer:

Dear God, /
thank you for Queen Esther /
and her brave example /
of acting on her faith. /
Amen. /

As the children leave, bless them: “(Name), be brave and help others! Go in God’s grace today.”



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

King: Hi, I'm the king. Whatever I say is the rule! (say, "Whatever I say is the rule!")

Queen: Hi, I'm Esther. I am the queen, but no one knows I'm Jewish. (whisper, "I'm Jewish.")

King: I've heard the Jewish people are doing bad things. They all need to leave! (stomp foot and say, "They all need to leave!")

Queen: I'm sad because the king is hearing lies about the Jewish people, my people. I need to talk to the king, but I'm scared. (say, "I'm scared.")

King: I'm the king. Whatever I say is the rule! (say, "Whatever I say is the rule!")

Queen: My cousin said maybe I was made queen so that I could save my people. I will pray to God to help me be brave. (pray, "Please God, help me be brave.")

King: Hello, my queen. Why are you here? (say, "Hello, my queen.")

Queen: You have been told lies about the Jewish people, my people. Please save them. (say, "Please save my people.")

King: I love you. I will not send them away. You are very brave. (say, "I love you. You are brave.")

Queen: Yay! Let's have a party and celebrate. (celebrate with claps and cheers)

The king takes two giant steps forward.

Queen Esther dances.

The king decrees, “Let there be a party!”

The people jump up and down.

Queen Esther takes two queenly steps backward.

Queen Esther says a prayer—bow your head.

The people turn in a circle.

Queen Esther jumps for joy!

The king holds up his scepter (arm in the air).

Queen Esther shouts, “Hooray! God’s people are saved!”

The king “high-fives” the queen.

The people clap and cheer for the queen.

Esther Saves Her People



Queen Esther acted on her faith and saved her people.

