

Brave in Fearful Times

Facing fear with bravery is what we are talking about today as we continue our wavemakers series.

Introduction

We have been teaching this series on wavemakers. These are people who have had a tremendous impact on those around them, their community, the Church, and the world. So far, we have looked at Caleb and Joshua who spied out the promised land in Righteous Perspective Among Naysayers and Women of Great Faith. Last week we spoke about Stephen having courage in the moment and today we continue our series of Wavemakers with the story of Esther and how she demonstrated bravery in fearful times.

Someone jumping out in front of you, a near-miss in your car, or any life-threatening situation can cause fear. Facing something new or challenging can cause fear like public speaking or looking down from the top of a skyscraper.

A few years ago, our family took a road trip and went on a week-long vacation. One day, we headed to the mountains the kids and I decided to purchase tickets for an afternoon exploring an alpine ropes course. We were fitted with harnesses and a pulley mechanism that attached to the cables and ropes above our heads. We decided to start on the novice course which was about 25 feet in the air. We climbed a ladder to a platform and then traversed along a bridge with only one rope for our feet to walk across and one rope for each hand to hold, we were slow, but we were steady, making our way through the course. Then, we get to a point where there was one rope to hold onto and small wooden boards to step across that were dangling by another rope. I was terrified, I got tiny and my knees were shaking as I slowly slunk down to traverse the bridge to the next platform.

Once across, we came to a zipline. At this point, my daughter and I looked at each other and said, “there is no way we can do this”. Then a young boy caught up to us on the platform, moved his carabiner, jumped off the platform, and glided to the next platform about 30 feet away. We both looked at each other and said, “If he can do it, we can do it!” Then my son jumped in front of us, reminded us how the pulley and carabiner system worked and jumped off. So, I followed his instructions and jumped off the platform with Emma just behind me, we did it!

We were so amazed that we could step off and glide across the cable, it was breathtaking and exhilarating. We spent the next few hours going on more adventurous courses with higher obstacles and longer zip lines. We had a blast!

In situations of fear, we react in ways that release stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline. These stress hormones cause your blood pressure and heart rate to increase, and you start breathing faster. The blood in your body flows away from your heart and into your limbs, making it easier for you to fight or run. This is a normal response.

When we face fear head-on, like jumping off a platform and ziplining through the forest, we realize we can accomplish much and overcome our fears. Queen Esther faced a fearful situation that almost cost her her life when she demonstrated bravery in a fearful time.



A Jewish Queen

Esther lived in a time when Jews were living amongst the Persians when King Xerxes the first reigned. She had been chosen by the king after his wife Queen Vashti did not obey and order he gave her one night at a royal banquet. Queen Vashti's disobedience led her to be banished from the palace and no longer queen.

After a long search for a new queen and several months of beauty treatments, Esther won the favor of the King and was welcomed into his palace as Queen. Early in her reign, Esther's cousin Mordecai, a Jewish government official refused to bow to the second in command, Haman as was the custom. Let's read Haman's response to Mordecai's refusal to bow in Esther 3:5-6.

Esther 3:5-6

(5) When Haman saw that Mordecai would not kneel down or pay him honor, he was enraged. (6) Yet having learned who Mordecai's people were, he scorned the idea of killing only Mordecai. Instead, Haman looked for a way to destroy all Mordecai's people, the Jews, throughout the whole kingdom of Xerxes.

Haman set a date to destroy all of the Jews in the kingdom with the approval of the King.

Prayer and Fasting

When Mordecai heard of the plot he told the Jews and they all began to mourn and fast. He begged Esther to approach the King and ask for mercy saying to her in Esther 4:13-14

Esther 4:13-14

(13) "Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. (14) 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 your royal position for such a time as this?"

Esther needed to act, but to approach the king could mean her life. She told the Jews and her servants to fast on her behalf as she prepared to approach the king. In her culture, she was not to approach the king unless summoned, even then, she could only approach if he lowered his scepter. For her to approach the King and him not lower his scepter, could mean immediate death.

Esther did the only thing she knew what to do, fast and pray. God was the only one who could deliver the Jews. She needed God to give her favor with the king.

We see the practice of prayer and fasting throughout scripture. Ezra led the Jews in fasting and praying as they headed to Jerusalem to rebuild the city in Ezra 8:23

Ezra 8:23

(23) So we fasted and petitioned our God about this, and he answered our prayer.

Before going into war, the Israelites would fast and pray, asking God for wisdom and deliverance from their enemies. In the book of Acts, the disciples fasted and prayed before choosing disciples to evangelize and before appointing church leaders. Throughout the book of Psalms, we read of godly people fasting and praying when seeking an answer from God.



Esther knew this is what she had to do. She desperately needed God to intervene in keeping the Jews from being annihilated.

A Brave Act

After the three-day fast, in bravery and fearing for her life, Esther approached the King. He was pleased with her and lowered his scepter. She then invited him to a banquet and the next day humbly made her request to the king in Esther 7:3-6

Esther 7:3-6

(3) Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life—this is my petition. And spare my people—this is my request. (4) For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king.” (5) King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, “Who is he? Where is he—the man who has dared to do such a thing?” (6) Esther said, “An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!”

King Xerxes immediately had Haman brought to the gallows and hung. Mordecai was appointed in Haman’s place and honored by the king. The Jews were saved from extinction and to this day, in the Jewish culture Purim is celebrated as the day the Jews got relief from their enemies, and as the month when their sorrow was turned into joy and their mourning into a day of celebration.

Bravery In Spite of Fear

Because Esther was brave enough to face her fear, the Jews were delivered from an evil plot. The Holy Spirit gives you what you need when you need it. Just like jumping off a platform to sail over a forest, the step-off is scary, but when God is with you, to help you face that fear, you have the courage and bravery to stand against anything that comes against you.

First John 4:18 tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. God is love. Greater is he who is in you, than anything that can come against you.

Conclusion

We can learn a lot from the story of Esther and the bravery she displayed. We learn that with God, all things are possible. He can deliver us from evil and anything the world throws at us.

We learn that through prayer and fasting, we will hear from God and the Holy Spirit will give us the wisdom to know how to act or what to say in fearful situations.

And finally, we cannot forget to celebrate when we see God show up! Mordecai declared the celebration of Purim which is still celebrated today with the exchanging of gifts and feasting. It is to remind the Jews of God’s great hand upon their lives.

What has God done for you that you can celebrate? There are so many things he has accomplished in each of our lives, we have so much to be grateful for.

Esther was a wavemaker. She confronted her fear by being obedient to God and in doing so saved a nation. You too can be brave in fearful times. You too can be a wavemaker by praying and fasting and committing your plans to the Lord.



