



Chapter 02

Esther & Prudence

Understanding / For your preparation as a leader / Page 40 – 51
Discussion / To use with your group / Page 54 – 61

UNDERSTANDING

What do I need to know about this passage?

Picture this: it all depends on you.

You find yourself in the confidence of a powerful person who has the intention and ability to destroy all the people you love most—your family, closest friends, and community. He doesn't desire to harm you, but he doesn't know you are connected to the people he's about to destroy. What would happen to you if he knew your roots? If you speak out, you expose yourself as an outsider. But if you stay silent, keeping yourself safe, you'll guarantee the loss of all those you love. How would you act? What would you do?

This is exactly what happened to Queen Esther in the Old Testament. In an unexpected turn of events, Queen Esther finds herself in an impossible situation. She is faced with a choice. If she chooses one course of action, she could lose everything, including her life. If she chooses another, she will live knowing she was complicit in the destruction of her people. The stakes couldn't be higher.

Notes

What would you do? How would you make such a decision?

Our lives, like Esther's, are full of difficult choices: How should I approach this conversation? What career path should I pursue? Which vocation should I choose? As followers of Jesus Christ, we want to choose what is best, to live lives of excellence, giving the best of ourselves to God and others. To do that, however, requires an incredible, though often misunderstood virtue, prudence.

Esther needed prudence in this key moment—her life and the lives of others depended on it. And because she was prudent, she became a hero. In this Bible study, we will explore prudence, learn how we can grow in it, and discover how it enables us to live excellently in imitation of Jesus Christ. Let's dive into Esther's story.¹

Esther's Story Unfolds

Imagine being in Esther's shoes.

She is a Jew in exile. Over seventy years ago, a foreign people, the Babylonians, invaded Jerusalem. They destroyed the city and took the

¹ Note that different editions of the Bible number Esther differently. This text follows the RSVCE numbering.

Notes

Jewish people away into captivity. Since then, the Jews lived as strangers in a strange land, mourning the loss of their homes and the Temple.

Then, things get worse. A second foreign power, the Persians, overcome the Babylonians. Now the Jewish people are second-class citizens under yet another dangerous enemy. Some Jews were permitted to go back to Jerusalem, but many didn't go; it was simply too dangerous.

Life under the Persians was difficult. It was not safe for the Jews to practice their faith or worship their God publicly.² Many, like Esther and her cousin Mordecai, remained faithful to the Jewish law by worshipping God in secret.

Esther isn't exactly well-positioned to respond to these challenges, either. She was born in captivity and orphaned in her youth. Mordecai adopted her and raised her as his own (Es 2:7). In many ways, she is an unlikely hero. But God has great plans for her.

The Book of Esther begins in dramatic fashion (Es 2:1-18). The King of Persia³ dismisses his queen after she disobeys him in public. To find a suitable replacement, he hosts a beauty contest and calls upon beautiful virgins from across his empire. Esther is selected by the king and is named the

² Bergsma, John, and Pitre, Brant. *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 50.

³ King Ahasuerus, pronounced uh-haz-yoo-eer-uhs

Notes

new queen. She now finds herself in a high-ranking position, behind enemy lines, married to a king who very much wants to be obeyed and respected.

Then, tragedy strikes. The villain of the story, Haman, a high-ranking member in the king's court and an enemy of the Jewish people, becomes increasingly hostile. Every day as he enters and exits the court, he expects to be paid homage (Es 3:5). But Mordecai refuses. He must remain faithful to his God and his faith. He will not bow in obeisance to his enemy.

Furious from Mordecai's refusals, Haman hatches a sinister plan. He convinces the king that the Jewish people are disrupting the kingdom and bribes him to issue an edict announcing a day for their destruction. Mordecai, Esther, and all the Jews are now in grave danger.

Desperate to stop this massacre, Mordecai exhorts Queen Esther to intervene. Initially, she refuses. Approaching the king without being summoned was considered a capital offense (Es 4:11). Esther could be killed—she knew what happened to the previous queen. But Mordecai insists, writing, "Think not that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place... And

Notes

who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” (Es 4:13-14).

Now, Esther must choose. Will she risk her life to save her people? Or will she maintain silence to save her own life? After seeking counsel, Esther resolves to intervene, fully aware that she may lose her life as a result (Es 4:16). But she cannot simply barge into the king’s presence with her request. She must be more prudent than that.

First, she asks all the Jews in the city to fast with her for three days. Then, she adorns herself in beautiful attire and prepares to meet the king. Mustering her courage, she enters his presence, her heart “frozen with fear” (Es 15:5). But the king’s spirit softens when he sees Esther turn faint. He welcomes her, embraces her, and says, “Speak to me” (Es 15:12).

Now, Esther executes her plan. Seeking to win the king’s heart, she invites him to a banquet. This is incredibly shrewd. Before she makes her request, she demonstrates her respect for the king, and the king receives her offer eagerly. He even invites her to make a request of him. But Esther decides to secure the king’s favor by hosting another banquet. She tells the king she will make her request tomorrow. The king is pleased and eagerly accepts her offer.

At the second banquet, Esther makes her petition.

Notes

Having won the king’s favor, she reveals her Jewish identity and pleads for her people, saying, “[I]f it please the king, let my life be given me at my petition, and my people at my request. For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to be annihilated” (Es 7:3-4).

Shocked, the king cries out, “Who is he, and where is he, that would presume to do this?” (Es 7:5). Esther reveals that it is Haman. Enraged, the king orders Haman to be hanged. He also revokes his edict concerning the Jews, not only sparing them from death but also giving them permission to defend themselves from their foes.

Esther’s prudence saved her life and the lives of all her people.

Prudence

Esther’s heroism has everything to do with her commitment to the virtue of prudence. What is prudence?

Prudence is “right reason in action.” What does this mean? Well, fundamentally, it means that to be prudent, we must think well and act well. Prudence helps us apply our right reason (our thinking) to practical things (our actions).⁴ Unfortunately,

⁴Prudence is one of the four cardinal virtues. The Catechism defines prudence as “the virtue that disposes practical reason to discern our true good in every circumstance and choose the right means of achieving it” (1806).

Notes

prudence is commonly thought of as being overly cautious or slow to act, but in truth, it is quite different. It is the ability to choose what is truly best.

We can break down prudence into parts to help us easily understand how to practice it. According to St. Thomas Aquinas, there are three parts to every prudent act.⁵ They are counsel, judgment, and action. Taking a look at these parts can help us more easily identify where we can (or maybe need to) grow. Let's look at each:

- **Counsel:** First, we must know what is good in order to do it. This first step of prudence encourages us to take the time to discover what is good and what potential options might achieve that good. This often requires that we ask for the insight and wisdom of others, especially when we are young. We frequently have blind spots in our lives about what is best for us or how to achieve it; to grow in prudence, we should seek the counsel of those wiser than us. Thus, this first step is called "counsel". We also grow naturally in this part of prudence by acting and failing. Experience is a great teacher, and we will grow in prudence as we learn from our past, especially our mistakes!

⁵See *Summa Theologiae*, Second Part of the Second Part, Q. 47

Notes

- **Judgment:** We cannot theorize or discern forever. After thinking through what is good and the options available to us to achieve it, we must make a firm decision about which path is the best choice at this moment. Judgment is our second step in acting prudently. After we've received counsel and deliberated about the possible paths we can choose, we move on to decision-making. This requires both an act of the intellect—in the selecting of our next steps—and of the will—in the firm resolution to pursue that path.
- **Action:** Finally, we must follow through with our intentions! Action helps us do the good. It is the part of prudence where we actually do the thing we've determined is most in line with what is truly good. Prudent people are not overly cautious or slow to act; they do not wait around and delay making choices about their actions. They act confidently and swiftly. After considering the circumstances, they do not delay in pursuing the good. After they have made a choice, they follow through.

Esther moves through all three aspects of prudence as she wrestles through the best course of action:

- First, she gets counsel from Mordecai, and though she at first does not want to abide

Notes

by it, eventually she consents, realizing that her older, wiser cousin can see what she does not: she is unlikely to escape the harm that will be done to her people, even if she tries to protect herself.

- Next, we can see her move from a place of fear and hesitancy to decisive judgment. She assents to what is truly good, taking advantage of her circumstances for the sake of saving the lives of those she loves, despite the potential harm to herself.
- Lastly, we see Esther overcoming her fear and actually doing what she intends. After having asked for the prayers of her people, beseeching God through them for her success and their salvation, she says, “If I perish, I perish” (Es 4:16). This is a clear sign of her commitment to do what is good. Ultimately, we read that she does “everything” Mordecai asks of her.

Notes

What about us? Are we living all three of these aspects of prudence? Counsel: Are we thinking rightly about things and seeking answers from trusted sources or are we just “going with our gut”? Judgment: Are we making clear resolutions and firm decisions or are we half-heartedly remaining on the fence? Action: Are we doing what we have resolved to do or are we only sort of doing it? If we want to be prudent, then we need all three.

Application: Excellence

Esther’s prudence also leads to something else: excellence. Excellence is one of the “Big Three” virtues in FOCUS. It is the habit by which we give the best of ourselves to our vocations and daily responsibilities while entrusting the rest to God.

Esther risked being killed for approaching the king unsummoned. But she prudently assessed that the greater good was the salvation of her people—their destiny hinged on her decision! Therefore, she chose what was most prudent, risking her own life for them and entrusting the outcome to God’s

Notes

providence. Because of this, Esther is remembered as a genuinely excellent heroine in Scripture. Indeed, people who live excellence are the heroes we admire, the people we want to imitate.

Isn't this the kind of excellence we want in our lives also? Deep down, don't we want to be remembered as people who loved God and others deeply? To be people who chose what was good, despite the challenges, and gave our all to our relationships, our daily responsibilities, and mostly importantly, to Christ? And don't we desire to do more than merely scrape by, wasting our lives with excessive scrolling, shopping, or gaming? We want the great life that Christ promises!

Rather than being stuffy or dull, prudence makes this kind of heroic, excellent living possible. By cultivating the habit of seeing what is truly good, discerning the best path to achieve it, and actually doing what is good (prudence), we will become capable of giving the best of ourselves to God and others (excellence). Indeed, prudence makes excellence possible.

Theologian Peter Kreeft once wrote, "In heaven, I think, one of the things we will praise and thank God the most for is how wildly and wonderfully and dangerously he put the driving wheel of our

Notes

life into our hands."⁶ Each day, we stand at a crossroads. The goings-on in our daily lives require us to decide which way to turn. Sometimes, the choices that lie before us are ordinary: Should I say what's on my mind? Should I ask for help? Should I turn left or right? And sometimes, the choices may be extraordinary: Should I risk my reputation, my security, or my life for the sake of what is good and true? Should I change my career to make more time for Christ and His mission? Should I marry this person? Whether it is in the ordinary or the extraordinary, we need prudence to think and act excellently.

In this study, let us learn how to live true excellence. Let's not succumb to the temptation to take the easy way out. Instead, like Esther, let's prudently pursue the excellence to which God calls us so that we can grow in Christlike character.

⁶Kreeft, Peter. Discernment: *Does God have one right choice for me in each decision I make?* The Coming Home Network International. Accessed at <https://chnetwork.org/2011/10/31/discernment-by-peter-kreeft/> August 6, 2026.

Notes

DISCUSSION

RSVCE:
 Esther 2:1-11, 15-18
 Esther 3:1-6, 8-11
 Esther 4:1-17
 Esther 14
 Esther 15:1-16, 5:3-5 and
 7:1-10

NAB:
 Esther 2:1-11, 15-18
 Esther 3:1-6, 8-11
 Esther 4:1-17
 C:12-30
 Esther D:1-16, 5:3-5 and
 7:1-10

Discussion guide for your Bible study

Note to the Leader: Different Bible translations number Esther passages differently. Passages for the RSVCE and NAB are given in this study.

01. Launching Question: What qualities come to mind when you think of a “hero”? Who do you consider a hero and why?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

Many qualities contribute to a heroic character and heroic actions. One quality we’re going to dive into today is the virtue of prudence. Now, at first, prudence may not sound at all like it has anything to do with heroism. However, we will find in our discussion that heroic action depends on prudence. But first, let’s ask: what’s prudence?

Share a brief introduction to the virtue of prudence (doing the right thing, in the right way, at the right time). Refer to CCC 1806.

Notes

Please read aloud:

This study explores what prudence is, how we can grow in it, and how it enables us to live excellently in imitation of Jesus. To accomplish this, we’ll turn our attention to the Book of Esther and witness her struggle but ultimate success as she makes a prudent decision with consequential effects.

For context, Esther is a Jew in exile under Persian rule. Life under the Persians was difficult. It was not safe for the Jews to practice their faith or worship their God publicly.¹ Esther was born in captivity, orphaned in her youth, and adopted by her cousin Mordecai. In many ways, she is an unlikely hero. But God has great plans for her. We enter the story immediately after the King of Persia (Ahasuerus²) dismisses his queen (Vashti) after she disobeys him in public.

Read Esther 2:1-11, 15-18 (RSVCE and NAB)

02. Write your own observation question about the situation Esther finds herself in. You may also write an understanding question to discuss what this situation might mean for her.

Allow the group to discuss.

¹ Bergsma, John and Pitre, Brant, *Introduction to the Old Testament*, p. 50.

² King Ahasuerus, pronounced uh-haz-yoo-eer-uhs

Notes

Answers may include: Esther is selected by the king and named the new queen. She now finds herself in a high-ranking position, behind enemy lines, married to a king who demands strict respect and obedience.

03. Why might Mordecai have charged Esther not to share “her kindred or her people” with the King, or, in other words, that she is a Jew?

Answer: Mordecai was asking her to protect herself.

04. Would you say that concealing her identity is prudent or imprudent? Why or why not?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Many answers are welcome. Whether a specific action is prudent often depends on many variables. One action done a certain way can be prudent, but the same action done a different way may be imprudent. In Esther’s case, an argument for either prudence or imprudence can be made.

Read Esther 3:1–6, 8–11 (RSVCE and NAB)

05. In this passage, the villain of the story,

Notes

Haman, a high-ranking member in the king’s court and an enemy of the Jewish people, becomes increasingly hostile. What does Haman seek to do? How might this affect Esther, the new queen?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Haman seeks to have all the Jews destroyed because they are not paying him the homage he demands. Esther is now in a precarious situation. Should she reveal her identity in an attempt to save her people? Or should she remain silent to preserve her own life?

06. We may never face dire circumstances like Esther and Mordecai did. But we will certainly face difficulties of many kinds. Have you ever found yourself in a difficult or seemingly impossible situation? How did you navigate it?

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

Haman’s plan to eradicate the Jewish people continues to move forward. He offers the king a great sum of money to persuade him to issue a letter calling for their destruction. Let’s continue the story as Mordecai and Esther learn of this horrible news.

Notes

Read Esther 4:1-17 RSVCE and NAB

The virtue of prudence has three essential parts: counsel, judgement, and action. By counsel, we seek to discover what is best and the right means of achieving it. By judgment, we decide what to do. And by action, we carry out our decision.

07. How does Esther exercise counsel and judgment (note: action will come later)? What good does she seek, and what means does she judge to be best to achieve it? What factors must she consider in her decision?

Answer: Esther recognizes the predicament of her people and their need to be freed from this unjust decree. She also knows that approaching the king could lead to her death. Initially, she refuses to approach the king. But after receiving counsel from Mordecai, she resolves to approach the king, even if it means she might die.

08. How does Mordecai's counsel help Esther make her decision?

Answer: Esther realizes that her older, wiser cousin can see what she does not: she cannot escape the harm that will be done to her people, even if she tries to protect herself. He counsels her, saying,

Notes

“Who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” emphasizing that she may be uniquely situated and therefore called in her particular circumstances to act on behalf of her people.

09. We can often be tempted to make decisions without seeking counsel. Why is it important for us to think rightly about our lives and get good advice before making important decisions?

Allow the group to discuss

Optional: Read Esther's prayer (Esther 14 RSVCE or C:12-30 NAB) to see how she clearly struggled with intense fear but ultimately entrusted herself to God.

10. “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” This statement could be said of each of you, each Christian, and each person alive today. You've been made for such a time as this, and the trajectory of our lives (and our character) hinges upon the decisions we make every day. What decisions have you made, if any, that altered the trajectory of your life? What missed opportunities may you have let pass you by because, like Esther, you may have been too scared of the consequences?

Notes

Allow the group to discuss.

Please read aloud:

Seeking good counsel and making firm decisions to do what is good are essential for living the virtue of prudence. At the same time, we must also follow through with our intended actions. Let's see how Esther follows through with her decision to intercede on behalf of her people.

Read Esther 15:1-16, 5:3-5 and 7:1-10 RSVCE (or Esther D:1-16, 5:3-5 and 7:1-10 NAB)

11. How does Esther complete the third aspect of prudence: action? How is she prudent, even in the way she takes action?

Allow the group to discuss.

Answer: Esther performs the action that she determined was best. But she doesn't rush into the decision. She is careful to win over the king's favor first. She has people praying for her. And she makes her request to the king when the right moment is at hand. She not only does the right thing, she also does it in the right way at the right time.

Notes

12. Prudence is sometimes misunderstood as being overly cautious or tentative. How does Esther's decision show us that prudence can also mean taking bold action to achieve what is good?

Answer: In Esther's story, prudence means making the heroic decision to risk her life for the sake of her people. Prudent people act swiftly after having come to a decision point. They are careful in their deliberation and humble in receiving counsel, but they do not stay in this stage forever; they act!

13. Esther's prudence allowed her to give the very best of herself to God and others. The name for giving of ourselves in this way is called excellence. We often want to do good things for others, but we also can struggle to do so. How can growing in prudence help us become more excellent? How does prudence help us give the best of ourselves to God and others?

Allow the group to discuss.

14. Write an application question that invites your participants to consider where in their lives they most need to grow in prudence.