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## ESTHER 2

### Esther Series

The story of Esther is a beautiful story. It's beautiful because it allows us to see what God is doing on the grander scale. Sometimes in our finite minds we wonder where God is. Sometimes in the pain of our lives we wonder what God is doing. And when we look at the book of Esther we're encouraged in our faith because bad things happen, hard things happen in this story. Yet the veil is pulled back and we get to see what God is doing in this bigger picture. So it's a great thing that we see in this book of Esther and we're going to go forward now. Look at Esther 2 with me.

*Verse 1: Later when King Xerxes' fury had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.*

If you weren't here with us last week we looked at chapter 1 and in chapter 1 we saw that the king had asked Vashti to come in to a bunch of drunken men so that everybody could look at her. That's what it says right in the passage. He was drunk and he wanted to bring her in so everybody could look at her. In other words, they were using her as an object and she refused to come. And because she refused to come, she was deposed as the queen and therefore we have a problem: we don't have a queen.

*Later*, it says, *King Xerxes' fury had subsided and he remembered Vashti*. There's this impression that there was this sense of regret maybe that he experienced because now he doesn't have a queen.

When it says *later* it doesn't define how much later, but we can deduce this from the passage. If you look at chapter 1 verse 2 you'll see that the banquet where Vashti was deposed was in the third year of his reign and if you look at verse 16 of chapter 2 you'll see that Esther's going to come onto the scene and she's going to become the queen in the seventh year. So there's four years in there that we're talking about later. We're not talking about just the next week after he got sober. We're talking about four years later.

We know from history that during that four year period of time he was out trying to conquer more of the world. The Bible tells us he already had 127 provinces and in the midst of all those provinces he wanted more. He wanted to go to Greece and take over Greece. And so he tried to do that, but history tells us that he failed.

Now he comes back; he's back in his own kingdom, back at Susa, and he has to be content with just 127 provinces. But he doesn't have a queen. The solution is brought to him quickly by the attendants because nobody likes an unhappy king. So they want to give him a solution real quick.

Here's their solution, verse 2. *Then the king's personal attendants proposed, "Let a search be made for beautiful young virgins for the king. Let the king appoint commissioners in every province of his realm to bring all these beautiful young women into the harem at the citadel of Susa. Let them be placed under the care of Hegai, the king's eunuch, who is in charge of the women; and let beauty treatments be given to them. Then let the young woman who pleases the king be queen instead of Vashti." This advice appealed to the king, and he followed it.*

The king has lots of women that he has access to. The problem isn't women; the problem is he doesn't have a wife. There's a difference between all the women and the wife. And he doesn't have one. He doesn't have a life companion that he'd like to have.

It reminds me of the proverb that Solomon wrote that says, *He who finds a wife finds what is good and receives favor from the Lord.* King Xerxes didn't have a wife. He needed one, he knew that he needed one, and he missed Vashti maybe, but he knew he wanted a wife, not just a bunch of women. So he is on the hunt to find this special one.

I would just suggest it's good cause for us husbands to take a moment and value our wives, recognizing that our wives are a treasure and they're valuable. It's a treasure to have a life partner. So we don't want to take them for granted. We want to honor them in our lives. But it's also a place where our spirituality gets worked out, doesn't it? Because when you're living with a wife that is not an easy thing sometimes, so we end up having to give up some of our selfishness. We have to study her, we have to value, we have to communicate that to her. It's very important for us to do that as we're moving forward because what we're trying to do is take advantage of the fact that we have this. But we don't want to take her for granted; we want to value her, love her.

Xerxes didn't have a wife. He wanted to find one, so the plan was established for getting her. Find a bunch of beautiful girls for the king from all over the kingdom, let Haggai be in charge of preparing them for the king, and out of those girls the king would choose one to be the new queen.

Verse 5: *Now there was in the citadel of Susa a Jew of the tribe of Benjamin, named Mordecai son of Jair, the son of Shimei, the son of Kish, who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.*

Kish is the grandfather of Mordecai (we're going to learn about Mordecai here) and Kish was taken into captivity with the others like Daniel and Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Kish came with them. And now the grandson of Kish is Mordecai. That's who we're talking about.

Let me just read you some of the history just so you're aware of what's going on. If you want this particular handout there are some sitting at the table back there for you. This is a timeline that I really like because down at the bottom of the timeline it has all of the Old Testament books

of the Bible. You may not be able to say them in order like Ze'amiye can, but at least you'll know where they come from and where they fit in history.

If you look here, this is the entrance to Canaan when Joshua came in and they took over under Joshua's leadership the whole land of Canaan. But then they had this time of the judges here where judges ruled and reigned. But then the people asked for a king, so they had the monarchy under the leadership of Saul, then David, and then Solomon.

When Solomon's kids took over they split the kingdom. We have a divided monarchy and so we have a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. The problem is all of the kings in the northern kingdom were bad. There were no good ones of all of them. In the southern kingdom most of them were bad. I think there were two or three good ones out of the sixteen or whatever there are in the southern kingdom. A lot of bad ones. And so God uses other nations in the geopolitical world to take them into captivity and to judge them. That's what you have happening here. You have the fall of the northern kingdom first of all in 722 B.C. and then 150 years later the fall of the southern kingdom.

The southern kingdom of Israel (Jerusalem was in that part) was made of two tribes, the tribe of Judah and the tribe of Benjamin. Those are the two tribes in the southern kingdom. Now I hope you remember in our passage that Mordecai was from the tribe of Benjamin. So when Nebuchadnezzar and all of his army came in and they took people from Jerusalem, conquered the southern kingdom there, they took all those people back to Babylon. You've got Daniel there in the kingdom and so on. They were in captivity for seventy years.

Then they started to go back under the leadership of three men, Zerubbabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah. Those are the guys who are coming back and they're rebuilding the temple, rebuilding the city, rebuilding the walls. That's what they're doing, coming back to do that. Fifty thousand or so Jews from around the world who had been scattered all over the place now return, but many of them don't. And for whatever reason (we don't know why) Mordecai does not return. He stays there in Persia. It was the Babylonian kingdom that took over, but in the book of Daniel under his ministry the kingship changed from the Babylonian Empire to the Persian Empire.

So now we're in the Persian-Media Empire. That's where we are at this point. And now our story takes place right here in this last segment right before the end of the Old Testament. As people have gone back to the land we have some people who didn't go back, and one of those people is Esther.

This is a picture of the land because you'll see that this is Susa here where Persepolis is and then over here is Israel. So you have the northern kingdom and the southern kingdom is way way over here. Small country which has lots of ramifications even for our world today. Many of the people returned back to that part of the world.

Now verse 7, go on there. *Mordecai* -- we're learning about Mordecai. He was the descendent of the tribe of Benjamin. He *had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother*. Some people say and there is a tradition that says that Mordecai was her uncle. But the passage is pretty clear that they were cousins. The idea is

probably he is a lot older than she is and he is the one who raised her and took care of her and stepped into her life at a time of great need. Her parents passed away or they died. We don't know how they died, but she didn't have a mom or a dad. So Mordecai stepped in and helped them.

It's amazing to me what God does in nontraditional families. I've just got to say this because I'm so impressed with what God does in the lives of kids who are adopted or foster care or in blended families or in single-parent families. God is at work in those. Not only is He at work today, but even in the Bible we have plenty of examples of that.

We have Moses, for example, who grew up in Pharaoh's household but he had a love for the Lord. Daniel, who was taken as a teenager away from his family, but had convictions inside. Nontraditional families. Joseph's family had lots of problems; lots of bickering and jealousy and problems between dad and mom and all the kids. The consequence of all of that fighting was that the sibling conflict resulted in the kids selling Joseph off as a slave and he gets taken to Egypt as a boy, as a teenager.

But God is doing something in the midst of that. It's amazing to me that God can take any person, whoever they are, and with His saving grace He can do a work inside of them. It's powerful what God can do. It's exciting to me to watch that happen.

I'm writing a book (actually I'm not writing anything right now because I'm working so hard at Calvary Chapel), but I have this idea of a book I'm trying to write called *Ten Traits of a Successful Family*. If I ever get to write it it's going to be a really good one. The premise of the book is we look at God's word and see about the family of God, what makes the family of God successful, then we take that and apply it to earthly families.

In the very introduction of the book I'm saying this: If you're going to have a successful family it does not require that you have a dad and a mom, two kids, a dog, and two cars, a garage, and a house. What we consider the traditional family is not what makes a successful family. A successful family is one who is able to take the vision that God has given them and pass it on to the next generation and be that place where we're growing, we're discipling, we're evangelizing. It's a ministry center. That's really important.

God takes ordinary people from ordinary places and ordinary times and does great things in their life. I just want you to be encouraged about that because no matter what your past has in it, that does not exclude you from being used by God. Broken relationships, painful experiences; those kind of things can happen in our lives, but God is at work, God wants to do some great things in our lives because He uses ordinary people and He uses ordinary days.

Moses is walking at an ordinary day and he sees a burning bush and it's that moment that God calls him. It was an ordinary day for him.

David in an ordinary day when he was taking care of the sheep and a prophet comes in and says, "I'm supposed to anoint a king here. Is there anybody else besides the guys here?" They say,

“We’ve only got a little brother. He’s out with the sheep.” “Bring him out here.” And they anoint him as king on that ordinary day.

God likes to use ordinary days and you never know when God might do something special in your life. You never know whether this will be the day that God is going to call you to something more, that God is going to do something extra in your life. You never know what He’s going to do. We don’t know what this day will hold, which makes the Christian life somewhat of an adventure. I know some of you are saying, “I need a little less adventure, please.” But I’m convinced that God wants to do some great things in us and we want to be anticipating that. We never know. There are exciting things that happen in the Christian life and that’s the adventure, that’s the excitement of what God is doing.

Now as we look at the book of Esther we see that God is in control and it starts right in here as we see God in control of a situation where a little girl loses her parents and a cousin steps in and raises her. It starts there. It’s going to continue as we go forward, but God is in control.

It may appear in your life sometimes that God is hidden, that He’s not there. It may appear that He’s quiet or sleeping in our finite minds. Sometimes we look at the world and we imagine all kinds of things and we’re saying, “Where is God in the midst of this?” and we’re in pain sometimes because of this.

The beauty of this book is we get to see who God really is. We may not see it in our lives. I think you’ll be surprised. If God ever opens your eyes and He lets you see what He’s doing behind the scenes, you’ll be surprised how busy and active God really is in your life. You may not get to see it until you get to heaven, but God is busy and active and working behind the scenes in every one of our lives. God is there. He’s using our decisions to accomplish His will whether we dedicate those decisions to Him or not. God is at work.

And what is God’s will? Simply God’s will is to bring Himself glory. He’s interested in manifesting that and having everybody else see the glory of God. That is His first choice. Not to bring the glory to me or any one of us; it’s His glory that’s the most important thing.

The book of Esther pulls back the curtain and we get to see how God is working in the scenes in this little girl’s life and others to bring about these great things that are going to happen.

Let’s go on to verse 7. *Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This young woman, who was also known as Esther, had a lovely figure and was beautiful. Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died.*

Hadassah is her name. It’s translated myrtle, so if you know anybody named Myrtle then that name comes from this story. Esther, though, means star and we’re going to see that’s a great name for her as the story unfolds because she’s shining bright.

She’s a beautiful girl; it tells us right there in the passage. People are looking for beautiful girls for the king and so she stands out, she gets picked. Now who knows what happened in her early

life. We don't know all of the details of what's going on. We do know this, though. Someone came into her life, Mordecai, and started caring for her and loving her in a very personal way.

I love to see that. I love to see what happens in families when they adopt children into their home. I'm excited and I want to be a part of it. I really like to see it because when a family uses their home as a ministry center and they invite children into that to be in an environment or something, I say, "God must be doing something here. I want to be a part of it."

These three little kids that are sitting up here worshiping with me, they're in Monica and James' home. They're Christians, they love the Lord, and they've opened their home to these three children at foster care right now. They would like to adopt them. We're praying that God would work out the details.

You can imagine anybody who's in foster care or adopted has challenges that they need to work through. You heard Ze'amiye today. God is doing something in Ze'amiye's heart and she'll start a new school tomorrow. God is doing some work in her and I want to be a part of that.

We can teach those kids how to worship. We don't know how long they'll be here, but if we can teach them how to worship God what a privilege we have to be a part of what God is doing.

God is doing something in the life of this little girl, Esther. As she's then growing up she's a beautiful girl now and then people are seeing her and going, "Wow. Esther would be a good one as a candidate to be a part of this king's plan."

*Verse 8: When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Hegai. Esther also was taken to the king's palace and entrusted to Hegai, who had charge of the harem.*

Look at verse 9. *She pleased him and won his favor.* It's fascinating. She finds favor in the eyes of Hegai.

That reminds me of Joseph who finds favor in the eyes of the people he's working with because he's going to complete a job. When he says he's going to do something, he does it. He has integrity. And so he finds favor in the eyes of the people he's working for.

Hadassah, Esther is like that. She's finding favor in the eyes of people. It's her beauty that got her into the group, but it's her character that helped her find favor in the eyes of these people.

Let's go on. Verse 9: *She pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven female attendants selected from the king's palace and moved her and her attendants into the best place in the harem.*

God is orchestrating the events and Esther's being moved right into the place where God wants her. It's fun to watch God move things around. It's exciting to see. We don't always get to see it in life. Sometimes we just see the bad things, we see the problems happening. But God is at work in the midst of that.

Verse 10: *Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so.* I was contemplating that this week. I imagine myself being the counselor of some of these people.

How would I respond if Daniel said, “Counselor Scott, what do you think? Should I eat the king’s food or not?” I don’t know. Would I say, “Well, you’re in a new place. Eat the king’s food!” I don’t know how I’d respond in that situation.

I know what I’d respond if Esther came and said, “Should I marry this king?” My first question is, “Is he a Christian?” I want to know. I want you to be following the Lord and be equally yoked as you’re moving forward. But Esther hides her heritage and ends up marrying the king and God is going to use it in some powerful ways.

I do not recommend that a person marry a nonbeliever. The Bible has some clear things to say about such things. However, if you are married to a nonbeliever I don’t want you to think your life is over because “oh this has happened to me and now I’m married to someone who’s not following the Lord.” This passage should be an encouragement to you. Because here you have a person who loves the Lord coming into the king’s palace and now she’s married to the king who’s not a believer and God is going to use her in a powerful way. God may do the same thing in your heart as well.

We live in a world of ungodliness and worldliness. We live in a world where all kinds of bad things happen. We haven’t lived in a world that messes with life. I really don’t like what the king’s doing here. He’s obviously messing with the whole system that God designed for marriage.

We need to learn how to live in a wicked world without that wickedness affecting us, but knowing how to be a light in the midst of it. It is complicated for many people. So we don’t want to be quick to judge the Mordecais and the Esthers who are making certain decisions about what they’re going to do and how they’re going to do it.

You know, typically I would say, “Tell everybody you’re a Christian,” but if you’re in a work place that saying you’re a Christian is actually going to compromise your testimony, maybe you shouldn’t be talking about the Lord, just living the Lord. Then when the opportunity comes you have time to talk about it in private. I don’t know. I don’t want to judge the Mordecais and Esthers of the world for the decisions they’re making because God is working in their hearts and lives and that’s what He’s doing here. God is obviously present, He’s working, He’s doing powerful things in their lives.

Let’s go to verse 11. She’s in the palace. Mordecai now is a concerned parent. Notice this, verse 11. I can imagine this myself. *Every day he walked back and forth near the courtyard of the harem to find out how Esther was and what was happening to her.* He’s pacing. He’s pacing and wondering what’s going on. I’m a dad. I know what that feels like. I know what it means when I’m trying to be concerned.

My son-in-law, Peter, just came from Africa, flew back on the day that the massacre took place at the Westgate shopping center. We were eager to know is he okay, is he out of there? We wanted to know what was going on with him.

On that same day, Ben, my son who's a Marine, sent me the picture of Ben and me eating in that shopping center together. He and I were eating in that shopping center and Ben's saying, "Dad, this is the shopping center that's being held hostage today. I just want you to know. That's where we ate. Here's the picture of us eating there."

I'm a concerned dad as I think about my son who's a Marine and the things that are going on in our economy right now. How are the financial things of the government going to affect my son and the people he works with?

I'm concerned as a dad. That's why I like it when my kids check in with me and say, "Hey dad, I just want to give you an update on my life." That's why I call my parents once a week and say, "Hey dad and mom, I want to tell you what's going on in my life." Because concerned parents like updates.

That's how Mordecai, I'm sure, is feeling in the midst of this. He's pacing back and forth wondering what's going on in the palace.

Verse 12. This is the system, this is how it works. These next few verses are going to tell us how the women are prepared and how the system is going. Verse 12: *Before a young woman's turn came to go in to King Xerxes, she had to complete twelve months of beauty treatments prescribed for the women, six months with oil of myrrh (that is a lot Olay, I'll tell you) and six with perfumes and cosmetics.* That's a lot of Avon.

But I suspect it's not just cosmetics. I suspect that what they're doing is doing some training, some grace training, or some etiquette training in royal etiquette so these girls will know how to act around the king or how to act in royalty. Probably a lot of things they're being taught at this point.

Verse 13: *And this is how she would go to the king (each girl as they were ready to be taken to the king): Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. In the evening she would go there and in the morning return to another part of the harem to the care of Shaashgaz, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the concubines. She would not return to the king unless he was pleased with her and summoned her by name.*

It's actually a very sad and perverted thing that's going on here because the king who can do anything he wants is taking these women as property and each night he'll have sexual relations with a different one. They'll go into his concubine group and they'll be treated royally, but they will miss out on the benefits or the privileges of having a husband someday because they are the property of the king. I'm not just talking about the sexual benefits; I'm talking about the close, intimate relationship benefits of having a husband, someone who's going to be a life companion with you. They're missing out on that.



It's a pain to see this happen. This is worldliness taking place in the Persian world and our people, our godly people are in the midst of this and kind of watching them navigate through the whole thing. We live in a fallen world. Relationships are misused even today in different ways. We want to be careful how we interact in all of that.

Verse 15: *When the turn came for Esther (the young woman Mordecai had adopted, the daughter of his uncle Abihail) to go to the king, she asked for nothing other than what Hegai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested.*

It's interesting. It just makes a statement about her character. She not only listened to Hegai and his advice, remember she obeyed Mordecai in regards to not talking about her background. She's a humble, submissive, willing to obey kind of person which just makes another statement about her.

Next statement: *And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.* She had poise, not just beauty. She was the kind of person that had the internal character, not just the external facade.

Verse 16: *She was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the tenth month, the month of Tebeth, in the seventh year of his reign.*

*Now the king was attracted to Esther more than to any of the other women, and she won his favor and approval more than any of the other virgins.* I just want to punch this guy in the nose because he's abusing the whole system. But it's a beautiful story in the sense that he is valuing her for more than just her beauty. He sees that she has what he wants, a life companion, someone he can spend the rest of his life with. He wants her to be the queen.

We're continuing on in verse 17. *So he set a royal crown on her head and made her queen instead of Vashti. And the king gave a great banquet, Esther's banquet (that was the name of the banquet), for all his nobles and officials. He proclaimed a holiday throughout the provinces and distributed gifts with royal liberality.*

I don't know if you noticed, but this is like the third banquet so far. These people eat a lot in this book. We're going to see them eat a lot more as they go through here. He has this big party, he's really happy about what's going on. He wants everyone to share about this happiness.

It's a beautiful story because it's a story about a common person who lost her mom and dad and God has something special planned for her and God is going to do something inside of her heart. God can take any of us and do the same thing. He can take any of us and do something special in our lives to be the people that he wants us to be.

As we go into this next part of the story, we're leaving and we're going into a new paragraph, a new idea. We've already learned about Mordecai and then we learned about Esther. Now as the story's unfolding we're going to go back to a scene about Mordecai.

If ever you're writing a story, if you're reading a book it has those kind of parts where you start with this character and you start with this character and all the characters are out there and as the

story goes forward it weaves together to be this story makes sense. My wife's new book comes out this week. She's a fiction author and we open this whole story that's a great book. That's the kind of thing, only this is true about Esther, though the way they tell it is interesting.

We're going to go back to Mordecai and an interesting piece of information. We don't know what it's going to do yet, but we're going to be told this information because later it's going to be important. It sounds like some of our lives. We don't know what's going on now; hopefully later it'll be important.

Verse 19: *When the virgins were assembled a second time, Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate.*

When he says *the king's gate* that means something very important. The king's gate was the place where business was transacted. The gate was the place where the judges would sit and if anybody would have a problem they would come to the king's gate and the judges there would make a decision about it. It was the place where the news was shared with everybody. They didn't have newspapers or internet. It would go to the king's gate. They would find out the latest information. The king's gate was a very important place and that's where Mordecai is. It's a place of business.

Now let me just illustrate this. It'll bring some light to a passage in the New Testament. This passage in Matthew 16:18 says (we're talking about the church), *And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.* What that means is the business center of Hades, the planning center, the place where all the executives sit for hell, they'll never be able to overcome the church. That's what that passage means because the gates are so important. That's what's being described here. He's sitting at the gate.

And maybe it's Esther who got him a place sitting at the gate with some official position of some kind. Verse 20: *But Esther had kept secret her family background and nationality just as Mordecai had told her to do, for she continued to follow Mordecai's instructions as she had done when he was bringing her up.*

Verse 21: *During the time Mordecai was sitting at the king's gate, Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, became angry and conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.* Maybe they're gathering support. Maybe they're deciding who's going to pull the trigger. I don't know what they're doing here, but they're planning a coup, they're planning to kill the king.

Verse 22: *But Mordecai found out about the plot and told Queen Esther, who in turn reported it to the king, giving credit to Mordecai.* That's important. She reported and gave credit to Mordecai. *And when the report was investigated and found to be true, the two officials were impaled on poles.* Or they were hung on the gallows. I don't know exactly how they were killed, but they were killed and executed.

Notice the next statement: *All this was recorded in the book of the annals in the presence of the king.* These things were written down, but they were forgotten. Mordecai was never rewarded, he was never given any benefit for this thing that happened.

If it happens to you you might say, “This is so unfair. I do this thing, I save the king’s life and I don’t get any benefit out of it.” But God is working behind the scenes. What God is doing is He’s putting Mordecai in a position because now the king’s in debt to him. He doesn’t even know it! Later on the king’s going to find it out. He says, “Did we ever reward that guy?” No, we didn’t. “Okay, well let’s do something now.”

It’s all going to fit in later. But all the pieces of the story are coming out here and we don’t know what’s going to happen. That’s what happens in all of our lives. We don’t know what’s going to happen, we don’t know what’s going on, and sometimes we get frustrated with the things that are going on because we want God to solve the problem now. And yet God has some bigger plans. He’s unfolding those in ways we may never get to see, but God has a plan. God is doing the work. He’s powerful.

This week in our discipleship group we studied seven reasons why Christians suffer and then seven responses to suffering. This is taking suffering passages right out of the Bible and we tried to take those inductively and look at them and give us some ideas. If you would like that study, even if you couldn’t come last Wednesday, I encourage you to stop by the information table and talk to Sue and pick it up.

If you’re struggling with any suffering in any area of your life, you want to know how to respond to it using God’s plan and understand. But one of the keys has got to be to recognize that God is at work, God is in control. That’s why we trust Him and that’s why we give our lives to Him.

I would encourage you, if you are here today and you have never asked that Jesus Christ come into your life, if you’ve never come to the place where you say I want God reigning in my heart, you want to do that. Because God is in control and you want to know what He has for you, you want to be following His directive. You want to be doing what He has called you to do. That is so important. If you have not made that decision, we want to give you the opportunity to do that today.

As we sing a song, we are going to talk about “God, you are my all in all.” That means God, you are everything to me. That’s what we’re singing. God, you are everything to me. I would just encourage you in the quietness of your own seat, all of us, whether we’re Christians or we haven’t made that decision yet to accept Christ, just pray that to the Lord during this song because that is what keeps us in tune with the very heart of God. It’s strategic.

Let’s pray together.

[PRAYER] God, we are so grateful for your word. This particular story recognizing the providence, the control, and the goodness of you as our God is so helpful. Lord, we need this. We need it because sometimes we don’t see, we don’t understand. We think life’s unfair. It’s painful. Our lives are difficult. We need this truth and so I ask, Lord, that you would teach us as

we go through this book. Give us the lessons that we need. Help us to grow in you as we trust you more. Lord, I pray for those here today that haven't accepted you as their Lord and Savior, that they would make that decision today and be able to trust you and turn their lives over to you. We ask this in Jesus' name, amen.