

# Hanging out With Heros

## ESTHER

A Crash Course  
in Courage



Lorraine  
Peterson

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**New International Version of the Bible**

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# **ESTHER; A CRASH COURSE IN COURAGE**

## **Introduction**

If you feel that you've dug yourself into a hole and you're lonely and afraid, the story of the life of Esther will help you. She shows us that fear can be conquered and that there is a way to get back on the right track. Have you ever backed yourself into a corner and let fear keep you there? Fear can ruin your life, so you need to know how to overcome it. The life of Queen Esther can give you a crash course in courage.

**What Happens If You Get Yourself into a Mess?**

The events recorded in the book of Esther took place about 474 B.C. when the Persian Empire ruled most of the known world. The empire reached its height during the reign of King Xerxes. Except for Greece, which had repelled his powerful army, Xerxes' empire contained most of the land in the world worth having.

When Vashti, Queen of Persia dared to disobey King Xerxes, he divorced her. And to find a suitable replacement, he sponsored an empire-wide beauty contest to choose a new queen. The winner was Esther, a Jewish orphan. Her people had been led as captives to that part of the world after the Babylonians had destroyed Jerusalem in 587 B.C. When the Persians had conquered Babylon, King Cyrus allowed the Jews to go back to the land God had promised Abraham, but many families chose to stay. Esther's family was one of these. Her parents died when she was young, so Mordecai, an older cousin, raised her. He advised her to keep her Jewish heritage a secret.

Life as queen of the world's greatest empire was not necessarily easy. By concealing her identity, Esther was really denying God. Besides, in order to keep her Jewishness hidden, she may have had to participate in pagan worship. Hypocrisy is no fun. And you can be sure that being married to a temperamental king with a large harem was no picnic.

But those soon became the least of Esther's troubles when Mordecai informed her that Haman, prime minister of Persia, had ordered that all the Jews be killed. Mordecai begged her to confront the king and plead for the lives of the Jews. She hesitated, however, because anyone who dared enter the king's inner court without an invitation was routinely executed – unless the king held out his scepter, his golden rod of authority.

### **What If You Need Some Extra Courage?**

Esther was afraid to go before the king. Mordecai then reminded her that she'd die anyway if all the Jews were killed (someone would blow her cover) and that this was her chance to save God's people. He reminded her that God had things under control and that His master plan did not include the destruction of the Jews. And if she didn't do something to save God's people, her family would be destroyed and God would have to use someone else to do the job. She had become the queen for just such a time. She got the point.

Recognizing her need for God's power, she asked the Jews of the capital city of Susa to fast (to go without food or drink) for three days while she and her servants did the same. Fasting would help them seek God. During this fast Esther must have prayed a lot for she found not only the courage to approach the king, but the best method of approaching him.

Dressed in her best royal robes, she took a deep breath and stepped into the king's inner court. Catching a glimpse of the king on the throne, she did not see the man who was her husband. She could only see the ruler who would shortly decide whether she would live or die. She walked closer and closer, each step seeming an eternity. Suddenly he held out his golden scepter and asked her what her request was. Phew! But she didn't tell him everything. She merely invited him and Haman to a banquet.

At the banquet she didn't make her request for the lives of the Jews. Instead, she promised to tell the king her request at a second banquet. The king was so anxious to hear what she wanted that he couldn't sleep that night. Finally, when Esther told him Haman had plotted to kill all the Jews, the king became furious and ordered Haman killed. He decreed that the Jews were free to defend themselves against any who tried to harm them. And he appointed Mordecai the new prime minister.

You will learn from the story of Queen Esther that even if you did wrong in the first place, God can supply the courage to do His will – if you earnestly seek Him and do what His Word says. He is the same God Esther had.

## **God's Magic Master Plan**

*“He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa, to show to Esther and explain it to her, and he told him to urge her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. Hathach went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ‘All the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law: that he be put to death. The only*

*exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king. ' When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 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 4: 8-14).*

Your sin and stubbornness got you into trouble. Now that you've had time to suffer the consequences of your actions, you feel completely trapped. And you feel it isn't fair to ask God to bail you out.

Or maybe it's the wrongdoing and pride of another person that created the circumstances that have imprisoned you. You feel crushed by the complex, tangled maze you must walk through. Well, its time you learned about something called the providence of God.

“Our God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him” (Psalm 115: 3) wrote the Psalmist. Do you believe those words? Do you realize God has a master plan for running this world, and that plan includes you? The theological word for this is, “providence,” and it is defined by the dictionary as “preparation for the future” and “wisdom in management.” In other words, God who is all-knowing has already decided how your problem will work out to His glory. The magic of God's master plan is that even if you or someone else messes it up, the moment you confess your sin and give the whole thing over to Him, He begins to unravel the mess.

Stories of kings and queens are fascinating. How romantic to have riches, power, and prestige! Well, life in ye olde palace isn't always so great, as Queen Esther discovered. She had been queen only a short time before realizing she had really ruined her life. Although she was queen of the huge Persian Empire, she was married to a king much older than she. As queen she had to share her husband with a large harem, which meant that she didn't live “happily ever after.” He was not known as an even-tempered man and hadn't even asked to see her for thirty days. Besides her marital problems she had spiritual problems, for even through her guardian had approved, she had

broken God's law by marrying a pagan king. And she had denied God by telling no one she was Jewish, a woman of God's chosen people. So much for royal romances.

To make matters worse, the king's prime minister was plotting to kill all the Jews in the empire; and Esther knew she was the only person who could ask the king to save her people. Yet, the law stated if anyone approached the king without an invitation, that person would quickly be killed – unless the king decided otherwise. And since the king had not called her for thirty days, she likely assumed he was angry with her. What was she to do? – She would probably die if she approached the king, or if she did nothing. No doubt she wished she could run away.

Then Mordecai, the cousin who loved her and had raised her, gave Esther the encouragement she needed: “And who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this?” In faith she accepted her responsibility.

No matter how badly you've messed up God's plan for your life – even if you've committed gross sin – if you will give the mess to God, He will give you a fresh start. He can work out His will from the midst of the worst of problems. He uses former drug addicts to spread the news about Jesus to people who might listen to no one else. He takes kids from broken, mixed-up families and gives those kids emotional stability and winsome personalities – so they can be great advertisements of His power. So whatever your situation, there is hope for you.

If you have sinned, ask for forgiveness, then pray, “God, bless this mess” – and He will! That's God's magic master plan.

*“Then the word of the Lord came to me: ‘O house of Israel, can I not do with you as this potter does?’ declares the Lord. ‘Like clay in the hand of the potter, so are you in my hand, O house of Israel. If at any time I announce that a nation or kingdom is to be uprooted, torn down and destroyed, and if that nation I warned repents of its evil, then I will relent and not inflict on it the disaster I had planned’” (Jeremiah 18: 5-8).*

1. What are the consequences (for a nation or individual) of persisting in sin?
2. What will God do for the individual or nation who confesses and forsakes sin?
3. What can a potter do with soft clay if the vase isn't turning out right? What can God do with a messed up life that is given to Him?
4. What areas of your life have you messed up? Are you willing to hand the complete mess over to God, believing He will entirely remake your life?

## **Fear Is a Liar**

*“Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai, ‘All the king’s officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king in the inner court without being summoned the king has but one law; that he be put to death. The only exception to this is for the king to extend the gold scepter to him and spare his life. But thirty days have passed since I was called to go to the king.’ When Esther’s words were reported to Mordecai, he sent back this answer: ‘Do not think that because you are in the king’s house you alone of all the Jews will escape. 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 4: 8-14).

You’ve had thoughts like these:

“Maybe I’d better not drive to work. What if I have an accident and the doctors have to amputate my leg? I’d never run another race.”

“What if the plane I take gets high jacked to Cuba and an international crisis develops so I’ll have to stay there all my life?”

“What if after all this work Mr. Footnote still gives me an *F* on my term paper so I’ll flunk English, and thus fail to graduate?”



“Maybe this bridge will collapse and all of us will drown within five minutes.”

“Now that I've bought a new sound system maybe the house will burn down and I'll never get to listen to it again!”

Crazy? Exactly. Fear is irrational – if you know God. And a good dose of truth will dissolve most fears immediately. Others may take a little longer, but they all will go.

When Esther said, “I can't go before the king because I'll get killed,” Mordecai reminded her that she'd die anyway if the Jews were all murdered. He also convinced her that God was running the universe – not exactly new information. He suggested that maybe God wanted to use her to protect His people, and she could expect punishment if she disobeyed Him. Facts tend to change a person's viewpoint. They changed Esther's.

Esther had fallen into a common trap; she had allowed fear to paralyze her and make her thinking fuzzy. Maybe she'd listened to people around her who were afraid of the king – the advice of ungodly people is often based on fear. But when Mordecai sent her the message, she listened to the truth and acted accordingly. This was step one in conquering her fear.

Like Esther, you must defeat fear with fact. You must learn to tell yourself the truth. If God sends you a Mordecai to set you straight, listen to him, take his advice, and thank him. If He doesn't send you a Mordecai, you must learn to use truth yourself – the truth that God is all-powerful.

Here's how to use truth against the fearful thoughts voiced in paragraph one. If such ideas go through your mind, talk to yourself like this; “God is all-powerful and He can prevent any accident. Besides, He could heal my leg so it wouldn't have to be amputated. And God certainly could make me happy even if I couldn't run in any more track meets.”

“If I got stranded in Cuba, God could make me such an effective missionary that the Communists would send me home.”

“If I received an *F* on my term paper, God could show me how to appeal to the teacher for a chance to do some extra credit work to make up for it. And if

I didn't graduate, I could always come back for another year. School's free and my time is God's, so if He wants me to spend another year in school that's His problem."

"If the bridge fell down, God could bring a boat to rescue me. If He didn't I would go straight to heaven and what could be better than that?"

If the house burned down, I could live very well without my sound system and other junk. God has promised to provide me with everything I need."

The passive (inactive, yielding) mind accepts fear and allows its fantasies to spread unchecked. To rid yourself of passive, gullible thinking, renew your mind by keeping it strong with truth from God's Word. Fear is a liar. Learn to call its bluff.

*"The plans of the righteous are just, but the advice of the wicked is deceitful"*  
(Proverbs 12: 5).

*"Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding"*  
(Proverbs 23: 23).

*"We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ"* (2 Corinthians 10: 5).

1. From whom should you accept advice?
2. Why is thinking the truth so important?
3. How can you bring every thought captive to obey the truth?
4. What lies has fear been telling you lately? Talk back with truth.

## **For the Frantic, Frazzled, and Frustrated**

*"Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai; 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish'"* (Esther 4:

15, 16).

The championship football game is next Friday and you're the quarterback. Already the jitters are attacking your stomach.

Your clarinet solo at last week's regional contest received an *A* rating, so you'll be playing at the state contest. Instead of being happy you're worrying about playing in front of those judges.

The Christian clique at school has chosen you to ask the principal if your group can have a room for prayer each morning before school begins. But your mind keeps playing a recording of Mr. Crabb at the last school assembly; "If you think I will allow students to run this school, you are mistaken."

You've just learned that your grandmother has only a few months to live – and you're not sure she's a Christian. You feel a tremendous responsibility to witness to her.

## **WHERE CAN YOU FIND SOME EXTRA COURAGE?**

When Queen Esther chose to risk her life to plead for her people, she was afraid. But she knew courage came from God, so she spent some time with Him by fasting. In Jewish tradition fasting was a way of separating oneself from the routine of daily life in order to seek God. Esther didn't think about the supper menu because she wasn't going to eat supper. She didn't think about what to do in the evening because she wouldn't be going anywhere. The time was completely given over to God. Fasting gave unhurried time for prayer. The events in the story of Esther prove she prayed much during her three days of fasting.

Through fasting, Esther became a different person. When the king saw her come before him, he was pleased with her. Had she been frantic, frazzled and frustrated – and fearful (as she had been three days earlier), the king would have turned away from her in disgust. But that day Esther entered his court with dignity and poise. Discreetly she withheld her request, rather than

blurting it out. She had received God's wisdom for the problem, and was willing to wait for His perfect timing.

Esther's God is your God. He can replace your fear with courage. But, as Esther, you must spend enough time with Him to learn what He wants, and catch His attitude toward the situation. Often you've heard people say, "I'm scared to death," or "I always get nervous when I have to speak in front of a group," or "I never sleep well the night before I start a new job," etc. maybe you say those same things. In order to reject such thinking and stop fanning the fire of fear with such remarks, you must catch some courage from God. You pick up the attitudes of the person you're closest to. Let that person be Jesus.

Instead of worrying about losing the football game or flubbing your solo, set aside a chunk of time to be alone with God. Here are a few suggestions on how to use that time. Think about the great ways in which God delivered frightened people in the past; the Israelites at the Red Sea, David facing Goliath, Daniel in the lion's den, Paul on a sinking ship, and Peter in prison waiting to be executed. Then think of the ways God has helped you and your friends. Then thank Him for being a God who helps His children. You also might do a Bible study on fear. Search in a concordance for all the verses that say, "Fear not." Then write them down, think about them, and let the Holy Spirit apply them to your situation. Soon your mind will overflow with courageous thoughts.

Once you've filled your mind with fear-killing thoughts, don't trust your emotions. The devil will whisper, "Your knees are shaking," or "You have a lump in your throat," or "You're scared to start the conversation."

If you listen to his voice you'll soon be as afraid as you were before. You can control your will, but not your emotions. So keep your mind on Jesus and His words, and charge ahead. Sooner or later the symptoms of fear will disappear.

You don't have to be frantic, frazzled, and frustrated. After all, God is not like that, and He lives inside you. He wants you to pick up His attitudes. Spend enough time with Him and you will.

*“ ... the Moabites and Ammonites with some of the Meunites came to make war on Jehoshaphat. Alarmed, Jehoshaphat resolved to inquire of the Lord, and he proclaimed a fast for all Judah. Jehoshaphat bowed with his face to the ground, and all the people of Judah and Jerusalem fell down in worship before the Lord. Early in the morning they left ... As they set out, Jehoshaphat stood and said, ‘... Have faith in the Lord your God and you will be upheld; have faith in his prophets and you will be successful.’ As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men ... who were invading Judah, and they were defeated” (2 Chronicles 20: 1, 3, 20, 22).*

1. After King Jehoshaphat and the people of Judah had spent enough time with God to catch His attitude, how did they fight the battle?
2. How did King Jehoshaphat, frightened by the huge invading army, become so courageous?
3. How did the people of Judah fight the battle?
4. What fear are you facing? Are you willing to spend enough time with God to catch His attitudes?

## **The World Revolves Around the Son**

*“I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish” (Esther 4: 16)*

When Esther decided to attempt saving her people, regardless of what might happen to her, she discovered one of the secrets of courage; looking first to the needs of others. Fear is atheistic – it leaves God out. But fear is also selfish – it leaves other people out. So one way to destroy fear is to concentrate on the needs of others instead of thinking about yourself.

You’ve possibly found yourself in situations like these:

The captain of the football team invited you to his party, so you went determined to make a good impression – but you were scared to death. In your nervousness you forgot the name of the hostess, stammered all over the place, and let your embarrassment spoil the whole evening. You felt as if you had made a fool of yourself.

You wanted so badly to play your best in the tennis tournament, but hundreds of people were watching the match, so you got stage fright. After a bad serve, you became so nervous you hardly held the racket. Now you're sure the coach will never let you play again.

You were playing in the spring band concert, feeling certain the spotlight was on YOU! If you went flat or played a wrong note, you might ruin the whole concert. Surely everyone was noticing your shoes weren't designer and your collar had a spaghetti stain. Such anxiety! It must have been the worst night of your life.

Did you notice the common characteristic in each of the above self-made disasters? Self-centeredness. Fear and self-centeredness always go together.

But once you take your eyes off yourself and start caring about and praying for others, your fear will disappear. You'll experience the same principle of unselfishness that sends a father back into a burning building to save his son, that makes a soldier voluntarily risk his life for his country, and that keeps a nurse in the room with a patient suffering a contagious disease. God has built into the universe a principle that gives extra strength and ability to the person who will forget about himself and attempt to help others.

This principle applies in even the smallest situations. If you go to the party at the football captain's house after the game and try to make other people feel comfortable rather than try to be the center of attention, you will feel calm and poised. If you try to make your tennis partner feel at ease, you won't have time to get nervous yourself. If you try to make things easy for the band director and spend your energy encouraging other band members, you'll make the concert much more enjoyable for yourself.

As a Christian you can experience this principle on an even higher level. You can release your concern for others through prayer. Pray for all the people who will be at the party, asking God to make you able to help somebody in some way rather than spending the minutes in front of the mirror wondering if you look okay. Pray for all the members of the tennis team, or the person who plays doubles with you instead of worrying about how you'll do. Pray that God will bless the concert and help everyone to play well.

Fear will trap you if you begin thinking only about yourself, because the world does not revolve around you. It revolves, instead, around the Son of God. He wants to take away your fear. But He won't do it unless you are intent on helping others.

*“Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them” (Joshua 1: 6).*

*“The Lord turned to him and said, ‘Go in the strength you have and save Israel out of Midian’s hand. Am I not sending you?’ ‘But Lord,’ Gideon asked, ‘how can I save Israel? My clan is the weakest in Manasseh, and I am the least in my family.’” The Lord answered, ‘I will be with you, and you will strike down the Midianites as if they were but one man’” (Judges 6: 14-16).*

*“But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1: 8).*

1. In the above verses God offers you freedom from fear. He also offers power to do what kinds of things?
2. If you obeyed God's command in each of the above verses, who would receive the most benefit – you or the person you are helping?
3. If you're constantly worrying about personal performance and public opinion, will you gain power from God and freedom from fear?
4. In what areas of life has self-centeredness made you a prisoner of fear? Talk with God about those fears.

## **Eradicating Evil**

*“‘If it pleases the king,’ replied Esther, ‘let the king, together with Haman,*

*come today to a banquet I have prepared for him.’ So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, ‘Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.’ Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. 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.’ King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, ‘Who is he? Where is the man who has dared to do such a thing?’ Esther said, ‘The adversary and enemy is this vile man Haman.’ Then Haman was terrified before the king and queen. Just as the king returned from the palace garden to the banquet hall, Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was reclining. The king exclaimed, ‘Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?’ As soon as the word left the king’s mouth, they covered Haman’s face. ... The king said, ‘Hang him on it!’ So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king’s fury subsided” (Esther 5: 4; 7: 1-6, 8-10).*

Sometimes evil seems so overwhelming that it frightens you, crippling your ability to live for Jesus. How can you witness to classmates whose talk centers on complaining, telling dirty jokes, and making fun of others? How can you maintain clean thoughts at the beach without a blindfold? How can you avoid getting caught up in the spirit of ruthless competition – comparing yourself with others, and exposing people’s faults in order to advance yourself on the “good guy totem pole”?

Esther had to contend with Haman – evil on two legs – and his plan to kill all the Jews. But she didn’t let fear overwhelm her. Instead of being crippled with fright, she faced Haman squarely and let God deal with him. She didn’t close her eyes to Haman’s scheme. She didn’t run from him in terror. She didn’t spend days whining about her predicament. Yet, she didn’t deal with Haman herself by concocting a little assassination plot. Instead, she invited Haman to the banquet and looked him straight in the face!

How could she be so confident? She prayed. And as she prayed, Esther



realized God would have to deal with evil – without her help. In this case God would administer justice to Haman through His appointed authority; the king. Esther only had to tell the king and Haman was as good as dead.

Because God has all power, He will defeat evil, so you don't have to be afraid. That, however, does not mean you should walk straight into temptation; you must continue to hate evil. But if evil comes your way, you can take God's hand knowing He can conquer all the forces of Satan. You don't have to hide, avoid all contact with non-Christians, or bury your head in the nearest sand-pile. Instead, stick close to Jesus and let Him conquer evil for you.

Now that you know how to avoid being paralyzed by fear of evil, don't fall into the other extreme; trying to eradicate evil in your own strength. The devil is stronger than you, so by yourself you'll always lose. You must stay so close to Jesus; He can defeat the evil before it hurts you.

Close to Jesus you'll have amazing victories, because you'll have your eyes on Him and not on the evil around you. With Jesus you won't be intimidated by the sinful, scandalous, sickening things your classmates talk about. Instead, God will give you faith to see what they would be like if they gave their lives to Jesus. With Jesus you'll no longer be paranoid about the beach. He can keep your eyes on the right things; He'll change your heart so instead of seeing the scantily clad bather, you'll see a person who needs Jesus. And with Jesus you can squarely face the evil of comparing yourself with others. You can be free, living to please Jesus and ignoring what everybody else thinks.

Don't let evil terrify you. Let Jesus exterminate it for you.

*“You, dear children, are from God and have overcome them, because the one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4: 4).*

*“For everyone born of God has overcome the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith. Who is it that overcomes the world? Only he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God” (1 John 5: 4, 5).*

*“I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world” (John 16: 33).*

*“To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy – to the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority, through Jesus Christ our Lord, before all ages, now and forevermore! Amen” (Jude 24, 25).*

1. Why don't you have to hide from evil?
2. What will happen if you fight evil in your own strength?
3. What is the right way to face evil?
4. Have you been guilty of a fearful, “What's the world coming to?” mentality? What should you do to change your thinking?

## **A Banquet for a Big Shot**

*“So the king and Haman went to dine with Queen Esther, and as they were drinking wine on that second day, the king again asked, ‘Queen Esther, what is your petition? It will be given you. What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom, it will be granted.’ Then Queen Esther answered, ‘If I have found favor with you, O king, and if it pleases your majesty, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request. For I and my people have been sold for destruction and slaughter and annihilation. 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.’ King Xerxes replied to Queen Esther and to Mordecai the Jew, ‘Because Haman attacked the Jews, I have given his estate to Esther, and they have hanged him on the gallows. Now write another decree in the king's name on behalf of the Jews as seems best to you, and seal it with the king's signet ring – for no document written in the king's name and sealed with his ring can be revoked.’” (Esther 7: 1-4; 8: 7, 8).*

Authority figures can cause a lot of fear – if you don't know how to relate to them. You might know how it feels to be in situations such as these:

When the principal calls you to the office, you shake in your tennis shoes, even though you're certain you haven't broken any rules.

When the boss wants to see you, your stomach becomes an Olympic diving champion!

When your gym teacher yells your name, you're certain he'll criticize you for something you're not doing perfectly.

Fear is a common response to such situations. Some people decide that the best offense is a good defense and start hurling word-darts at whoever is in authority. They figure this is the best way not to get hurt. Others turn into cowering "yes machines" or apple polishers. Neither method works very well.

There is a biblical way to handle authority; submission. God appointed each authority to keep peace. Whether it's the U. S. Government or Mr. White in typing class, that authority maintains sense and order. You must, therefore, be willing to obey the authority even if he or she is wrong. This attitude is submission. You can see this in Queen Esther. Rather than being rebellious, she was willing to obey the king's law.

However, when Esther felt the king was about to do something wrong, she appealed to him and gave him all the facts so he could make a better decision. She did it with a humble, submissive attitude. She first spent time with God to discover the best way to present her petition. She then invited the king to a banquet where he relaxed. She wisely made the king coax her request out of her instead of laying it on the line. Because she hadn't forced her request on him, the king never doubted her respect for authority. And he granted her request. Esther's method can work for you.

If your teacher gives an unfair test, don't rush up and complain. Find a way to tactfully and respectfully suggest a solution to the problem. If your boss makes you work every Saturday night so his nephew can have time off, let God show you a way to appeal to him and reasonably work out the problem. If your gym teacher rides your back because you're a klutz, find a way to explain (without blaming him for anything) that you're not good at sports, but would appreciate any suggestion for improvement. (This will give him a

chance to tell you what he wants without yelling.)

If authority figures frighten you so that you complain behind their backs, you have not learned how to appeal to authority. Asking a person in authority to change his mind requires four things;

1. Showing utmost respect;
2. Being willing to obey your authority if your petition fails;
3. Praying for the person and asking God how to approach him; and
4. Giving the person in authority an alternate plan that will fulfill the same goal.

To do this you must try to discover why the unfair decision was made. (Maybe the unfair test was given to make students realize they must study more. If so, suggest that students who improve their grades and hand in all their homework be allowed to take another test. Such a plan would allow the teacher to accomplish their goal and still be fair to the students.)

But if your appeal to authority fails, you must obey, trusting God to deliver you – even as Esther was willing to die if her banquet for Haman the big shot didn't succeed. (This, however, does not apply if you're asked to break God's law. If, for example, your boss asks you to lie to a customer, you'll have to refuse. If he fires you, God will help you find a new job.) After all, God is all-powerful and well able to show you how to handle the consequences. He can help you live through a *D-* on the test or working every Saturday night. He has a wonderful way of protecting people who really want to obey Him.

Having God's view of authority cancels out fear because it prevents reacting wrongly to the person in charge. When you respect and obey authority, you're obeying the God you love, the God who always has your best interests at heart.

*“Everyone must submit himself to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. Consequently, he who rebels against the*

*authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. For rulers hold no terror for those who do right, but for those who do wrong. Do you want to be free from fear of the one in authority? Then do what is right and he will commend you” (Romans 13: 1-3).*

1. Why must you submit to governing authorities?
2. Whom are you actually rebelling against if you are rebelling against authority?
3. Are you rebelling against God by not obeying someone in authority over you? If so, confess it as a sin.
4. How can you stop fearing those in authority?

## **Faith Remembers What Fear Forgets**

*“This happened on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth they rested and made it a day of feasting and joy. That is why rural Jews – those living in villages – observe the fourteenth of the month of Adar as a day of joy and feasting, a day for giving presents to each other. These days should be remembered and observed in every generation by every family, and in every province and in every city. And these days of Purim should never cease to be celebrated by the Jews, nor should the memory of them die out among their descendants” (Esther 9: 17, 19, 28). (The Jews still honor Esther every year during the feast of Purim, remembering how God sent her to save His people.)*

It’s probably happened to you:

You trusted God completely for last year’s biology final and He worked a miracle, giving you supernatural calm and peace as you studied for and took the test. This year, however, you’re a nervous wreck before the first chemistry exam.

You trusted God to run your social life last year, and you thoroughly enjoyed yourself. But now you’re desperate because all your friends seem to be happily dating. You feel left out.

You even trusted God as you witnessed to your friend who was moving to another state – and he accepted Christ. But now your hands become clammy when you think of telling the new neighbor kid about Jesus.

*God hasn't changed!* So what is the problem?

Yesterday's faith doesn't automatically cover today's fears. You have to continually stick close to Jesus, constantly renew your mind by letting the Bible speak to you, and daily receive the power of the Holy Spirit. Whenever your focus slips from God to yourself, you are in for instant trouble.

One way to keep your focus on God is to remember with joy and thanks what God has done in the past. God, in Old Testament times, decreed certain holidays so His people would regularly remind themselves of the great things he had done for them. Passover commemorates the last plague that forced the Egyptians to release God's people from slavery. Purim commemorates God's deliverance for the Jews in the Persian Empire. In the same way Christians celebrate Easter to recall Jesus' glorious resurrection. Recalling God's great deeds of the past focuses your mind on God's power. Obviously, there is the danger of treating these events as ancient history, and not receiving the assurance that God's power can also work for you. But recalling God's previous wonderful miracles as you expect future miracles destroys anxiety with nuclear force.

When fear threatens to smother your faith, recall how God has helped you in the past; then remind yourself how He will help you now. One of the Psalm writers did that. In the midst of discouragement he wrote: "These things I remember as I pour out my soul: how I used to go with the multitude, leading the procession to the house of God, with shouts of joy and thanksgiving among the festive throng. Why are you downcast, O my soul? Why so disturbed within me? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him, my Savior and my God" (Psalm 42: 4, 11).

Learn to effectively use the memories of victories God has won for you. Certainly you shouldn't degenerate into a what-happened-to-the-good-old-days dreamer. But when troubles come, recall with joy and thanks how God helped you in the past, then receive His power for your present situation.

Fear is irrational and tends to overpower clear thinking, so a specific task may help put your thoughts in the right place. When fear invades, therefore, try this prescription; On a sheet of paper write in big letters across the top “Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever” (Hebrews 13: 8). Beneath that verse, list all the times Jesus has given you victory. After each point add, “... and God can do it again.” You'll find it impossible to think about the greatness of God and be afraid at the same time. Faith remembers what fear forgets.

*“I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago. I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds” (Psalm 77: 11, 12).*

*“I remember the days of long ago; I meditate on all your works and consider what your hands have done” (Psalm 143: 5).*

*“Look to the Lord and his strength; seek his face always. Remember the wonders he has done, his miracles, and the judgments he pronounced” (Psalm 105: 4, 5).*

*“For this reason I remind you to fan into flame the gift of God, which is in you through the laying on of my hands. For God did not give us a spirit of timidity, but a spirit of power, of love and of self-discipline” (2 Timothy 1: 6, 7).*

1. Why should you remember the miraculous things God has done?
2. Why are God's miracles of the past so important to your present problems?
3. How does remembering what God has done for you overcome fear?
4. Consider a frightening situation you are facing. Reread the last paragraph before the Scripture quotations and make the kind of list described there.