

Risky Business

By Shari Miller

Before the study, read the entire Book of Esther *or* read **Esther 1–7** as a group to begin. *The story will probably read more smoothly if read from the same version.* After reading the story, share with a partner or the group the actress you would choose to play the part of Esther and why.

Opening Prayer: Heavenly Father, Bless our study of Your Word. With the Psalmist, we declare: *Your Word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.* Send Your Holy Spirit to give us insight and guide our discussion. We pray in the Name of Jesus, Amen.

The Book of Esther has all the makings of a good movie: a heroine, a villain, wealth and decadence, political intrigue and suspense. Esther learned that living at the heart of the Persian Empire as an exiled Jew was indeed risky business. She risked her **security, rejection from the king** and yes, her very **life!** She became an **advocate** for the Jewish nation living on the brink of annihilation.

Esther Risked: Her Security

Read Esther 2:5-9, 15.

(2:5) 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,(6) who had been carried into exile from Jerusalem by Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, among those taken captive with Jehoiachin king of Judah.

(7) Mordecai had a cousin named Hadassah, whom he had brought up because she had neither father nor mother. This girl, who was also known as Esther, was lovely in form and features, and Mordecai had taken her as his own daughter when her father and mother died. (8) When the king's order and edict had been proclaimed, many girls 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. (9) The girl pleased him and won his favor. Immediately he provided her with her beauty treatments and special food. He assigned to her seven maids selected from the king's palace and moved her and her maids into the best place in the harem. (15) When the turn came for Esther (the girl 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. And Esther won the favor of everyone who saw her.

In verse 15a, how is Esther identified? *The girl Mordecai had adopted and the daughter of his uncle – his cousin.*

What do we know about her from verse 7? *Jewish name was Hadassh (Hebrew “myrtle”); orphan; lovely; Mordecai had taken her as his daughter; girl.*

Read Esther 2:8b again. Did Esther (or Mordecai for that matter) have any choice in her life's direction? How do you know? *No; “Esther also was taken to the king's palace.” The word “taken” indicates no choice on Esther's part.*

Whose favor did Esther win (vv. 9, 15b)? *Hegai, everyone who saw her*

Hegai gave Esther the “royal treatment” so to speak! What did he do for her? *Provided beauty treatments, special food, seven maids, best room in the harem*

Read Esther 2:10-14.

(2:10) Esther had not revealed her nationality and family background, because Mordecai had forbidden her to do so. (11) 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. (12) Before a girl'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 and six with perfumes and cosmetics. (13) And this is how she would go to the king: Anything she wanted was given her to take with her from the harem to the king's palace. (14) 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.

What secret did Esther keep and why? (See also v. 2:20.) *Her nationality – that she was a Jew; her uncle told her to keep it a secret.*

(2:20) 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.

Before she went to the king, what did a harem girl do? *She had twelve months of beauty treatments.*
How secure do you think the life of a harem girl was? *Not very; life was dependent on the whims of the king and his servants.*

For additional discussion if time allows: God used Esther's beauty to place her in a position of influence with the king and she used the opportunity to serve her people. What resources has God given you? How can you serve God with those resources?

Esther Risked: Rejection from the King

Read Esther 1:4-12, 19; 3:8-11; 6:1-3; 7:7, 10.

(1:4) For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. (5) When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa. (6) The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. (7) Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. (8) By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink in his own way, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished. (9) Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes. (10) On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him—Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar and Carcas— (11) to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. (12) But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger. (19) Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she.

(3:8) Then Haman said to King Xerxes, "There is a certain people dispersed and scattered among the peoples in all the provinces of your kingdom whose customs are different from those of all other people and who do not obey the king's laws; it is not in the king's best interest to tolerate them. (9) If it pleases the king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will put ten thousand talents of silver into the royal treasury for the men who carry out this business." (10) So the king took his signet ring from his finger and gave it to Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, the enemy of the Jews. (11) "Keep the money," the king said to Haman, "and do with the people as you please."

(6:1) That night the king could not sleep; so he ordered the book of the chronicles, the record of his reign, to be brought in and read to him. (2) It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes. (3) "What honor and recognition has Mordecai received for this?" the king asked. "Nothing has been done for him," his attendants answered.

(7:7) The king got up in a rage, left his wine and went out into the palace garden. But Haman, realizing that the king had already decided his fate, stayed behind to beg Queen Esther for his life. (10) So they hanged Haman on the gallows he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the king's fury subsided.

What personality traits did King Xerxes display? *Answers could include: prideful, extravagant, flamboyant, impatient, easily angered, distrustful, impulsive (doesn't think through decisions to the consequences), forgetful, vengeful*
Would you have enjoyed being a citizen in this unstable king's country? How about being his wife? Why or why not? *It appears that King Xerxes temper and moods trickled down to the citizens of his nation; living in his household could be compared to "walking on egg shells"; no one wanted to anger the king.*

Esther Risked: Her Life

Read Esther 4:11; 5:2; 7:3-4.

(4:11) "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."

(5:2) When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

(7:3) 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. (4) 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."

After Haman devised the plan to destroy all the Jews, what risks did Esther face? *Her secret could be exposed; her life could be taken if it did not please the king to let her speak to him without being summoned.*

Read **Esther 4:12-14**.

(4:12) When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai, (13) 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. (14) For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?"

What counsel did Mordecai give Esther? *Speak up for who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this; he also cautions that she, too, will die because of the king's edict even though she is a member of the king's household.*

Read **Esther 4:15-16**.

(4:15) Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: (16) "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."

How did Esther prepare for her first unannounced visit to King Xerxes? *Fasting, prayer (usually accompanied fasting), placing herself in God's hands according to His plan.*

For additional discussion if time allows: Esther was chosen by the greatest king of the day to be his queen. She seemed to handle that honor gracefully. How can a person gracefully handle being chosen for a special honor? How can we honor God when we are honored?

Esther: Advocate for Her People

Read **Esther 8:1-8**.

(8:1) That same day King Xerxes gave Queen Esther the estate of Haman, the enemy of the Jews. And Mordecai came into the presence of the king, for Esther had told how he was related to her. (2) The king took off his signet ring, which he had reclaimed from Haman, and presented it to Mordecai. And Esther appointed him over Haman's estate. (3) Esther again pleaded with the king, falling at his feet and weeping. She begged him to put an end to the evil plan of Haman the Agagite, which he had devised against the Jews. (4) Then the king extended the gold scepter to Esther and she arose and stood before him. (5) "If it pleases the king," she said, "and if he regards me with favor and thinks it the right thing to do, and if he is pleased with me, let an order be written overruling the dispatches that Haman son of Hammedatha, the Agagite, devised and wrote to destroy the Jews in all the king's provinces. (6) For how can I bear to see disaster fall on my people? How can I bear to see the destruction of my family?" (7) 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. (8) Now write another decree in the king's name in 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."

King Xerxes' irrevocable decree of annihilation is still a threat to the Jews, even after Haman's death. Esther once again risks her life to appear before the king. Why? *Her people were still at risk, scheduled for destruction.*

Skim the rest of **Esther 8 – Esther 10**. How is the situation resolved? *Another edict is issued that give the Jews the right to defend themselves and they triumph over their enemies.*

Jesus Christ: Our Greatest Example

How is Esther's willingness to serve her people a foreshadowing of the life of willing obedience Jesus would live for us? Look at the following passages to review what Jesus gave up, endured, and accomplished for our sake.

Security: John 1:14; 2 Corinthians 8:9; Philippians 2:7

(John 1:14) The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

(2 Corinthians 8:9) For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, so that you through his poverty might become rich.

(Philippians 2:7) ...but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.

Rejection: Isaiah 53:3; Matthew 27:46; Mark 6:1-4; Luke 23:11; Acts 4:11

(Isaiah 53:3) He was despised and rejected by men, a man of sorrows, and familiar with suffering. Like one from whom men hide their faces he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

(Matthew 27:46) About the ninth hour Jesus cried out in a loud voice, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?"—which means, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?"

(Mark 6:1) Jesus left there and went to his hometown, accompanied by his disciples. (2) When the Sabbath came, he began to teach in the synagogue, and many who heard him were amazed. "Where did this man get these things?" they asked. "What's this wisdom that has been given him, that he even does miracles! Isn't this the carpenter? (3) Isn't this Mary's son and the brother of James, Joseph, Judas and Simon? Aren't his sisters here with us?" And they took offense at him. (4) Jesus said to them, "Only in his hometown, among his relatives and in his own house is a prophet without honor."

(Luke 23:11) Then Herod and his soldiers ridiculed and mocked him. Dressing him in an elegant robe, they sent him back to Pilate. (Acts 4:11) He is the stone you builders rejected, which has become the capstone.

Life: Isaiah 53:5-7; Matthew 20:28; Romans 5:8; 1 Peter 2:24

(Isaiah 53:5) But he was pierced for our transgressions, he was crushed for our iniquities; the punishment that brought us peace was upon him, and by his wounds we are healed. (6) We all, like sheep, have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; and the LORD has laid on him the iniquity of us all. (7) He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth; he was led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before her shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth.

(Matthew 20:28) ...just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many.

(Romans 5:8) But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

(1 Peter 2:24) He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed.

Jesus Christ: Our Greatest Advocate

Read Acts 2:32-33; 1 John 2:1-2; Hebrews 4:14-15; Romans 8:34b; 1 Timothy 2:5.

(Acts 2:32) God has raised this Jesus to life, and we are all witnesses of the fact. (33) Exalted to the right hand of God, he has received from the Father the promised Holy Spirit and has poured out what you now see and hear.

(1 John 2:1) My dear children, I write this to you so that you will not sin. But if anybody does sin, we have one who speaks to the Father in our defense—Jesus Christ, the Righteous One. (2) He is the atoning sacrifice for our sins, and not only for ours but also for the sins of the whole world.

(Hebrews 4:14) Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. (15) For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin.

(Romans 8:34b) Christ Jesus, who died—more than that, who was raised to life—is at the right hand of God and is also interceding for us.

(1 Timothy 2:5) For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus...

Who is the Advocate between God and man? **Jesus Christ, God's Son, Savior.** What does that mean for you personally? **He knows my needs and intercedes on my behalf.**

Be a Risk-Taker!

Because of the saving work of Jesus our Advocate, what "risks" are we privileged to take?

Luke 9:23-25 deny ourselves, take up our cross and follow Jesus.

(Luke 9:23) Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. (24) For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. (25) What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self?"

John 15:1-8 bear fruit; bear much fruit

(John 15:1) I am the true vine, and my Father is the gardener. (2) He cuts off every branch in me that bears no fruit, while every branch that does bear fruit he prunes so that it will be even more fruitful. (3) You are already clean because of the word I have spoken to you. (4) Remain in me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in me. (5) I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing. (6) If anyone

does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned. (7) If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you. (8) This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be my disciples.

2 Corinthians 3:4, 12 we are bold to share the hope we have in Jesus Christ

(2 Corinthians 3:4) Such confidence as this is ours through Christ before God. (12) Therefore, since we have such a hope, we are very bold.

Ephesians 3:12 we can approach God with confidence, not fear

(Ephesians 3:12) In him and through faith in him we may approach God with freedom and confidence.

Ephesians 6:10-18 we are strong in the Lord, who gives us the full armor of God

(Ephesians 6:10) Finally, be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power. (11) Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil's schemes. (12) For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (13) Therefore put on the full armor of God, so that when the day of evil comes, you may be able to stand your ground, and after you have done everything, to stand. (14) Stand firm then, with the belt of truth buckled around your waist, with the breastplate of righteousness in place, (15) and with your feet fitted with the readiness that comes from the gospel of peace. (16) In addition to all this, take up the shield of faith, with which you can extinguish all the flaming arrows of the evil one. (17) Take the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God. (18) And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints.

Hebrews 4:6 again, we can approach God with confidence, knowing we will receive His grace and mercy

(Hebrews 4:6) Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need.

Hebrews 10:23-25 hold to the hope that we have and profess that hope; spur one another on toward love and good deeds; meet together and encourage one another

(Hebrews 10:23) Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. (24) And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. (25) Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Hebrews 12:1-3 fix our eyes on Jesus; persevere

(Hebrews 12:1) Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. (2) Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. (3) Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

James 1:2-4 face trials; testing of faith

(James 1:2) Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, (3) because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. (4) Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Identify the risk takers, the risks and the results in the following passages:

	Risk Taker	Risk	Result
Matthew 14:25-29	Peter	walk on water	works, until Peter takes his eyes off Jesus
(Matthew 14:25) During the fourth watch of the night Jesus went out to them, walking on the lake. (26) When the disciples saw him walking on the lake, they were terrified. "It's a ghost," they said, and cried out in fear. (27) But Jesus immediately said to them: "Take courage! It is I. Don't be afraid." (28) "Lord, if it's you," Peter replied, "tell me to come to you on the water." (29) "Come," he said.			
Mark 5:25-34	Sick woman	healed or not being healed	her "risky" faith was acknowledged by Jesus and she was healed
(Mark 5:25) And a woman was there who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years. (26) She had suffered a great deal under the care of many doctors and had spent all she had, yet instead of getting better she grew worse. (27) When she heard about Jesus, she came up behind him in the crowd and touched his cloak, (28) because she thought, "If I just touch his clothes, I will be healed." (29) Immediately her bleeding stopped and she felt in her body that she was freed from her suffering. (30) At once Jesus realized that power had gone out from him. He turned around in the crowd and asked, "Who touched my clothes?" (31) "You see the people crowding against you," his disciples answered, "and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?' " (32) But Jesus kept looking around to see who had done it. (33) Then the woman, knowing what had happened to her, came			

and fell at his feet and, trembling with fear, told him the whole truth. (34) He said to her, "Daughter, your faith has healed you. Go in peace and be freed from your suffering."

Acts 15:25-27

Judas and Silas

their lives

confirmed the written testimony

(Acts 15:25) So we all agreed to choose some men and send them to you with our dear friends Barnabas and Paul— (26) men who have risked their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ. (27) Therefore we are sending Judas and Silas to confirm by word of mouth what we are writing.

Romans 16:3-4

Priscilla and Aquila

their lives

Paul's was saved; they had church in their home

(Romans 16:3) Greet Priscilla and Aquila, my fellow workers in Christ Jesus. (4) They risked their lives for me. Not only I but all the churches of the Gentiles are grateful to them.

Philippians 1:12-14

Paul

his freedom

witness to jailers; others encouraged to witness

(Philippians 1:12) Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. (13) As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. (14) Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

For further discussion if time allows: Can you think of other Biblical risk-takers? What can we learn from their examples?

For discussion: "The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you." Discuss this quote as it relates to Esther's "risky business." How does it apply to *our* "risky business"?

For discussion: Through the Holy Spirit, each baptized believer in Christ is made a daughter/son of God the King. What responsibilities come with that honor?

We *can* make a difference, even though we might have to take risks. Our faithful God promises to be with us. We are privileged to boldly proclaim with Paul in 1 Corinthians 9:22:

I do all this for the sake of the Gospel.

Closing Prayer: Dear God our King, We praise and worship You for Your greatness and majesty. We confess that we are not always ready to risk all for the sake of the Gospel of Jesus Christ. Because of the salvation that Jesus won for each of us on the cross, we are bold to make a positive difference in our lives and in the lives of those around us. Help us in our risky endeavors so that all we do be done to Your glory. We ask all this in the Name and for the sake of our Advocate Jesus Christ. Amen.

Suggested Hymn: "Fight the Good Fight" – *LSB* 664; *LW* 299; *TLH* 447

[Creative activities to enhance this study might include reading a book about Esther or watching a DVD and comparing them to the Biblical account. Visit the LWML Web site for a list of

possible books or DVD's included with the Leaders' Notes. For a more in-depth Bible study on Esther, use *Radiant in His Love* (a six session study) available from the LWML *Catalog*.]

Suggested DVD's and books

DVD's

Veggie Tales: Esther

The Girl Who Became Queen

Big Idea Productions

30 minutes

(Visit www.veggietown.com/videos/veggietales for fun games and activities.)

The Bible Series: Esther

Trimark Home Video

91 minutes

One Night with the King

20th Century Fox

Fox Faith Films

124 minutes

Books (Fiction)

Chosen: The Lost Diaries of Queen Esther by Ginger Garrett

Hadassah: The Girl Who Became Queen Esther by Tommy Tenney