



ESTHER DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

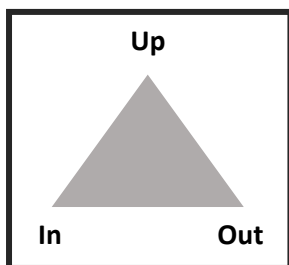
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily walk in the ways of Jesus, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus taught and modelled out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO ESTHER

Esther is the last of the historical books of the Bible. Its main character is, obviously, Esther. Esther means *Venus, the morning star*, a star that sheds its light after all the other stars have ceased to shine and while the sun still delays to rise. The deeds of Queen Esther beautifully cast a ray of light forward into Israel's history from a dark time. It is a story of survival at one of Israel's darkest times.

It is strange that in the whole of this book, which spans a period of four years, the name of God is never mentioned. However, His fingerprints and footprints are all through it. One of the things that should encourage us as we read this little book is the fact that both Mordecai and Esther are the most unlikely candidates to shape and change a nation. God uses and chooses whomever He will. I love this truth.

So, buckle up and let's dive in. I hope and trust you enjoy this as much as I have. Remember, mark your spot and gather your Bible, journal, pen, and a brew.

Love you all,
Phil

Live

Today we start this incredible little history book that tells the story of a young Jewess orphan who risked her life to serve God and save her people. King Ahasuerus is well known to history, though more commonly under the name Xerxes. He inherited the vast Persian Empire from his father, Darius I, who is mentioned in passages in Ezra, Daniel, and Haggai. Xerxes was an extremely powerful man, which shows all the more the significance of Esther's call.

It's kind of weird in that I like Vashti; she seems to have morals and backbone. Though Vashti was by no means a follower of the true God, she had enough wisdom and modesty to know that what the king requested was something she should not do. The so-called wise men were afraid that other men's wives would follow her example if she was left unpunished, so they devised an edict written in the law of the Medes and Persians which was irrevocable. Even the king himself could not revoke this (much like the law written to trick King Darius into killing Daniel).

The Bible says that wives have a special responsibility to submit to their husbands (Ephesians 5:22), yet this does not mean a wife must obey her husband if he commands her to sin. Every command to submit on a human level is conditioned by the higher obligation to obey God. Submitting means putting others before yourself; it means not always doing what you want to do; it means putting God's desires above your desires, just as Jesus lived in perfect submission to the Father. The Father did not have to coerce Jesus to become flesh and dwell among us. Jesus chose to enter the fallen, sinful world to lay down His life on the cross so that God could save the world through Him. Jesus came from heaven and chose to submit to the will of His Father to die on the cross. He chose to place Himself under the authority of the Father while being equal to the Father; that is true submission.

Pray

Father, I love these stories of risk and determination which are laced with Your incredible timing. Help me today to be a person daring and wild in my love and service for You, to give to You what You truly deserve – my all. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Chapter two opens with the words “*After these things...*”. This is a broader statement than referring to just the events of the previous chapter. Verse 16 indicates there was actually a four-year span between chapters one and two. During that time, King Ahasuerus made his great, unsuccessful invasion of Greece. He came home a defeated man and wanting to cheer his heart through sensual diversions. The plan was to assemble the most beautiful women of the land, bring them into a harem for the king, and choose the most favoured woman to be his queen instead of Vashti. This was a sort of “Miss Persian Empire” contest. The ancient Jewish historian Josephus says that Ahasuerus had a total of 400 women selected.

It is here we see the young girl called Esther come to the fore. She is called out of total obscurity to the king’s palace with a chance to become queen. I love how she keeps under the careful eye of Mordecai even when she is in the palace. It is evident that he loved her and wished to protect her. It would seem that Esther didn’t have any choice in this turn of events and she probably never thought God’s hand could be in it. This takes me to the many instances in my life where God stepped in when I least expected Him to. I’m sure you can think of times this has happened in your own life too. Oh, how many times the enemy has tried different things to destroy us only for our Father in heaven to turn them into good. He is, after all, the One who brings beauty out of ashes. I know of no-one else who can do such a thing. In this chapter, Esther goes from being a peasant girl with nothing to the queen of the most powerful person on planet earth at that time. She stole the king’s eye and his heart, and we are told he favoured her above all others. I love how God moves!

Pray

Father, reminds me in Ephesians 1:4 that I am chosen in Christ even before the foundation of the world. I love the fact that I’m “*in Christ*”. There is no better, no safer, no greater place to be. Thank You, Jesus, for coming into the world, living and dying for me. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It would seem to me, as I read this story, that King Xerxes is not the brightest kid in the class. He makes some snap decisions and one of these we see in this chapter. Xerxes chooses Haman, an Agagite, to be the top dog in the kingdom (next to himself, of course). Now, at this moment in the story we don't know too much about Haman other than he is an Agagite. If you trace that lineage back, you'll come to the great enemy of Israel, the Amalekites, a people that King Saul was supposed to completely obliterate from the planet, but didn't.

Haman hatches a plan. It is cunningly simple. All he has to do is concoct a story and convince the king that there are a group of people who do not obey the king's law, and, simply put, the whole land would be much better off if they were removed completely. But Haman is a superstitious soul and desiring the help of his 'gods', he casts lots to determine the exact month this removal will take place. He cast the lot in the first month and it falls on the last month of the year! That will give the Jews a whole year before D-Day! Obviously, it is not Haman's 'gods' guiding the lot here at all, it is Yahweh, the God of Israel!

Haman was an extremely proud and insecure man; he could only consider himself a success if everyone else thought he was a success. Haman was a man full of hatred and bitterness that eventually exposed him for what he was. If someone doesn't deal with unforgiveness and bitterness it will destroy them; this chapter is full proof of that. Let's never allow the cancer of unforgiveness and bitterness to take root in our lives. It's only because Jesus overcame sin and death for us that we dare call ourselves overcomers. It's only because He drank the cup of our judgment that we'll get to feast on the hidden manna of eternity.

Pray

Father, continue to free me to live by the names You've given me and not by what the enemy would lure me to believe. I know for sure that whom the Son sets free is free indeed. By the work of the cross and the power of redeeming love I'm truly free. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Mordecai was disturbed by all that was happening; his integrity was the cause of it; he couldn't stay silent. What stirs you to a righteous anger? It may be child abuse, slavery, sex exploitation, poverty, or a myriad of other things. Initially, Esther didn't know what was going on. After giving her a copy of the decree through a messenger, Mordecai challenged her to intercede before the king on behalf of her people. This principle applies to us also. God promotes us or puts us in a place for a reason; we need the courage and wisdom to see that reason and to walk in it. It was Spurgeon who said, *"You have been wishing for another position where you could do something for Jesus, do not wish anything of the kind, but serve him where you are."*

Taking the determination of the Lord, Esther decided that she would go and make a bold appearance before the king, but only if she was supported by prayer and fasting. Jesus reminded us that special spiritual battles sometimes require special preparation with prayer and fasting. Regarding a stubborn case of demonic possession, He said, *"this kind does not go out except by prayer and fasting"* (Matthew 17:20). It is so important that we get angry at the things that make God angry.

I'm sure you are like me and don't want to be a person who always leaves important matters to someone else or who thinks they couldn't make a difference. I am reminded of the statement, 'Evil only prevails when good people do nothing.' Dietrich Bonhoeffer relays in one of his books the story of a church near the railway lines where captive Jews were ferried to their horrible executions in prisoner-of-war camps. He tells that when the screams of the people were heard as they were trampled and suffocated in the overcrowded carriages passing the church, the church would just sing louder to drown out the noise. It is so important to speak up for those who don't have a voice, especially in the day and age in which we now live.

Pray

Father, there is so much I can learn not only from righteous Mordecai but also from this young girl Esther who stands up for what she believes in. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Esther showed courage in her willingness to approach the king without being summoned. Coming before the king without being sent for was a perilous thing to do; if he was in a bad mood, he could have you eliminated. Also, King Ahasuerus did not have a good reputation for treating his queens well. It may be that Esther could not find the courage to present her request on that first opportunity and used the successive banquets as a delaying tactic.

Verse 8 shows us that Esther displayed wisdom in waiting on the Lord and it is so important that we do likewise. Isaiah 40:31 reminds us, *“they who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength; they will rise up with wings as eagles, run and not be weary, and walk and not faint.”*

The sceptre of the king was an instrument of his power and might. When Esther touched the tip of it, she was acknowledging the king’s gracious invitation. Even though she was his queen, she still entered his presence with a fear and trepidation. I am drawn to Hebrews 4:16 *“Let us come boldly before the throne of grace that we may be able to find mercy and grace to help in a time of need.”* I love the fact that our heavenly Father invites us to come boldly. That actually means to come with a divine right to be there. God gives us the right as sons and daughters to come into the throne room.

Haman’s rage against Mordecai is quite unbelievable. When Haman saw Mordecai in the gate, it spoiled his whole day and he carried all this hatred home. His wife and friends advised him to have a pole fifty cubits high erected to have Haman impaled on. That’s seventy-five-foot high. He really wanted to make this humiliation brutally public; just like the devil really, he loves to humiliate us publicly!

Pray

Father, what an invaluable lesson we have in this reading today. Knowing when to speak and when to hold my tongue is something I need to continue learning. James reminds us, *“be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.”* In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

King Xerxes did what many do when they cannot sleep – he brought out a book and used it to fill the sleepless night, hoping reading would make him sleepy again. I love Spurgeon’s thought: *“Ahasuerus is master of one hundred and twenty-seven provinces, but not master of ten minutes’ sleep.”*

Esther wasn’t ‘lucky’ to be queen; Mordecai wasn’t ‘lucky’ to have overheard the assassination plot; it wasn’t luck or chance that made Haman enter the royal courts at this particular time. All of these events were orchestrated by God, not by luck. It is easy to see God’s management when we see good things happen, but what about the bad? Even then, we must trust God’s total plan, realising that *“all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose”* (Romans 8:28). Paul says ALL things work together; any one event taken in isolation may seem to make no sense, but when we see ALL things working together, we then see the ultimate wisdom of God’s plan.

I’m reminded that God sees the whole picture but, as the Apostle Paul says, we see only in part. Only a firm standing in grace and a humble certainty of God’s amazing love could move one to praise Him for the *“gift of affliction”*. This was true of the Apostle Paul who affirmed that believing in Jesus and suffering for Jesus were, equally, grace-gifts from God. Only the Holy Spirit and the Word can convince us of the same. Because Jesus took the judgment we deserve, God only disciplines us as His beloved children.

Talk about getting what’s due to you! Haman walked right into the trap set, of course, by God. We are told he *“rushed home with his head covered in grief.”* God will always get His work done. It’s actually only beginning for Haman; things are about to head south fast!

Pray

Father, because of Jesus’ finished work, I’m not afraid of You as my Judge; I revere You as my Father. Because You’ve robed me in the perfect righteousness of Jesus, I no longer dread Your decrees; I delight in them. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Even when Esther finally made her request, she showed great tact. She did not immediately identify herself as a Jew, just as Haman hid the identity of the group he targeted when he made his request. Esther also showed wisdom in how she framed her request. She appealed on a personal basis, knowing that she had never done anything but please the king. Esther exposed the truth about Haman. He was not a faithful servant of the king; he was an enemy more interested in his own status than the benefit of the king. Haman never imagined that Esther was a Jew and now he stood before the king being rightly accused of plotting the murder of the king's wife.

God is full of surprises and can never be outwitted. We can pray as the psalmist did: *"Behold, the wicked brings forth iniquity; Yes, he conceives trouble and brings forth falsehood. He made a pit and dug it out, and has fallen into the ditch which he made. His trouble shall return upon his own head, and his violent dealing shall come down on his own crown."* (Psalm 7:14-16) Perhaps the greatest example of this was when Satan thought that he had won by getting the crowd to crucify Jesus, but the cross turned out to be the instrument of his defeat.

Scriptures tell us that we have no right to revenge, no right to gloat when an enemy falls, no right to get back at or even with anybody. We are not called to be a doormat by any means, but to be a people whose reactions are shaped by the gospel in any and every situation. For that, we need tons of God's grace which is readily available. Aren't you glad God didn't 'get even' with us for all the ways we rebelled against Him? For all the ways we chose our gain over His glory, and misrepresented Him to the world and even to our own hearts, God didn't get even; He got generous with us through the cross of Christ which wrought our redemption. May the cross keep us humble and patient, longing for the day when He puts all things right.

Pray

Father, I don't want to waste precious time nursing grudges, fuelling self-pity, or gloating over the demise of an 'enemy'. Fill my heart with Your grace and praise. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

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Live

Haman, the disturbed man who had seemingly achieved everything, ended up with nothing. Absolutely nothing. Nothing to even pass on to his family. One might say that he had climbed the ladder of success but it was leaning against the wrong building. He should have lived his life after the wisdom of Solomon who carefully considered these things: *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”* (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

The king could not revoke the previous decree, so he simply made another decree giving support to the Jews against their attackers. When it comes to sin, God solves the problem not by compromising His decree for eternal justice, but by fulfilling justice in taking the punishment we deserved. His counter-decree saves us. I so love this verse: *“that He might be just and the justifier of the one who has faith in Jesus”* (Romans 3:26). God the Father, the Just One, passes the judgment, *“he that sins must die”*. Then God the Son steps into the role of the Justifier and becomes flesh; He becomes sin for us, bears the full penalty, and we go free. How about that for pure class!

As I get older, I just don’t have as much energy to juggle as many balls or spin as many plates as I used to. This is both humbling and freeing. If greater grace comes to the humble, then accepting our limitations is essential for our liberation. It’s not difficult to see that our busyness is rooted in fear, the fear of not being enough and having enough, the fear of losing face and losing control, the fear of missing the mark and missing out. But God’s perfect beauty and love can liberate this performer and perfectionist in us. We can trust God to be way ahead of us; after all, He knows the end from the beginning and we are part of His story!

Pray

Father, one day I will be made perfect in love all because of Your finished work on my behalf. That day has never been more attractive and alluring. May Your love continue to drive out all the fears still lurking around the chambers of my heart. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I have so loved studying the little book of Esther! We come now to the last two chapters. In short, the wicked Haman had worked his way to the top of the Medo-Persian Empire and used this position of power to enforce a decree to annihilate the Jews. God, however, had other ideas and used His even greater position of power to have Esther elected queen. Through her influence, Haman was exposed as the villain and ended up swinging on the very gallows he had constructed for Mordecai. The Jews had their enemies, those who wished to destroy them, yet they had someone great on their side, the king with all his resources. With the king for them, it didn't matter who was against them. We have our own enemies to deal with too, but with the King of kings on our side, we have no reason to fear. *"What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us?"* (Romans 8:31) The principle of remembering God's great deliverance is good; too often we forget His great works.

This passage is interesting prophetically, looking at Haman as a type of the coming Antichrist. Haman's ten sons speak to us of the ten kings mentioned in Revelation 17:12-24 that will rule with the Antichrist in the time of the end. In the book of Esther, we see that when Haman falls, his sons were defeated as well. This speaks of how the ten kings will meet their doom when the Antichrist will be defeated at the return of Jesus Christ.

The book finishes with a little chapter of three verses. In it we read of the ongoing fame of Mordecai who was held in high esteem throughout the kingdom and was second in rank to King Xerxes. He worked on behalf of his people and not for his own gain. Mordecai here is a picture of the Lord Jesus who shall one day rule over the entire world.

Pray

Father, how often I forget to worship, praise, and honour You for who You are and for what You have done in my life. You truly are Abba, my Daddy God, whom I trust and love with all my heart. If You are for me, who can ever be against me? Help me today to remember all that You have done. In Jesus' strong name I pray. Amen.

REFLECT

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