

The Queen of Beauty and Courage

God is near, present, and working ...
even when we can't see him.

Introduction

You might remember the *Where's Waldo?* phenomenon a number of years ago. Each spread of every *Where's Waldo?* picture book was filled with people going about their business ... at the zoo, in the museum, on the beach. But somewhere among them was Waldo. If you looked closely and studied the picture long enough, you would finally find his red-and-white striped shirt, blue pants, brown shoes, bobble hat, unique haircut, and distinctive eyeglasses.

With time, looking for this silly character became an international craze. The Icelandic people looked for Valli, the Norwegians scoured the pages for Willy, the French searched for Charlie, and Israelis played *Where's Efi?* The fun of these books was the process of looking for, and finally finding, Waldo.

Similarly, as we read each chapter of *The Story*, we discover that God is on every page, at work each moment, and present at all times ... even when he is hard to see. Chapter 20 is the account of Esther. This Bible book is unique because, in the full text of Esther's story, the name of God is never used ... not once.

Esther and her people faced a horrific threat in a foreign land. The story is an intrigue of persecution, conflict, a vicious enemy, twists and turns, and vindication. Yet despite the seeming absence of God, he is everywhere in Esther's story. The same is true in our story today ... even when we don't notice him.

Talk About It

Books such as *Where's Waldo?* and games such as hide-and-seek are great fun. But tell about a time you actually lost a real person (or got lost) and what it took to find them (or find your way again).

DVD Teaching Notes

As you watch the video segment for session 20, use the following outline to record anything that stands out to you.

The background of Esther's story and why Haman hated the Jews

Plotting against the Jews and an irreversible edict of doom

When the Lower Story seems hopeless, God is still writing an Upper Story

Esther comes on the scene "for such a time as this"

DVD Discussion

1. What were some of the cultural norms and laws that came into play in this chapter of *The Story* (for Vashti, for Haman, for the Jews), and why is it important for believers today to understand our culture as we seek to be God's presence and messengers of his grace?

2. What drives a person like Haman and how have you had to negotiate a relationship with a person with similar motivations? What wisdom would you give a Christian who is forced to work, live, and exist around a Haman-like personality?

*Haman rolled the dice,
but God determined
how the dice would fall.*

3. What characteristics marked the life and behavior of Mordecai? How can we take steps to grow character like Mordecai as we seek to follow God's Upper Story in our Lower Story lives?

4. Throughout this entire chapter, what strikes you about Esther's character, how she related to people, and the risks she took? What can we learn and gain from her example?

5. Eventually a great and radical reversal happened between Haman and Mordecai (Esther 5–7; *The Story*, pp. 282–285). How do you see God's hand at work bringing his Upper Story plan into the Lower Story of Haman's plots and schemes?

Tell about a time when you faced a situation that seemed hopeless (from a Lower Story, human perspective), but God miraculously turned things around. What helped you see God's presence and power at work as you walked through this situation?

6. In one of *The Story's* epic moments, Esther resolved in her heart to approach the king, reveal her national identity, and make an appeal for her people—despite the great risk involved. She concluded, "If I perish, I perish." Christians are called to "take up their cross daily" and follow Jesus (Luke 9:23). What is a risk God is calling you to take for him and how can group members stand with you as you follow God's leading?

7. A lesson from Esther's story is that God is going to accomplish his will, with or without us (Esther 4:12–14; *The Story*, p. 282). Tell about a time you entered into God's story and got to be part of his plan *or* tell about a time you opted out and missed an opportunity to be part of God's story.

God wants us to stand up with courage for what is right, like Esther did—we need to know that we too were called "for such a time as this" to fulfill God's plan.

8. At the end of this chapter, we read that God did not remove the danger of attack on the Jews, but provided a chance for them to fight back and defend themselves. What is a battle (against culture, world systems, or some evil) that God is calling you to fight? How can your group members pray for you and enter the battle with you?



9. Read movements 1–5 of *The Story* (pp. 10–11 of this participant's guide). How is God moving in the Lower Story in each movement?