

“HUDDLE UP!”  
by Rom A. Pegram (2/25/18)

When Jane and I go camping in the summer, one of the things we enjoy the most is having a camp fire. And, for whatever reason, we just enjoy taking the time to stare into it, and end the day with some very casual conversation. Has anybody else ever done that? Have you enjoyed a campfire like that before? Lots of good things come out those quiet times of staring into a fire...

One day, Lloyd Ogilvie—popular author and pastor—was staring into just such a fire, sitting all by himself, and God spoke a truth to him very clearly. Listen to what he learned on that very special evening and see if you don't agree with what God told him:

“For a log to ignite and burn, it has to be in contact with other burning logs. A log that doesn't lean on another that is already afire will not blaze. Similarly, even logs that have been burning will grow cool and lose their glow if they are left alone and do not find the company of other pieces of wood.”

Do you know what? That same principle God taught Lloyd Ogilvie on that quiet night in front of the fire long ago is *exactly* the same principle our teacher for today—Esther—learned about being a spiritual survivor. Here's her story ...

Esther, of course, was her Persian name. Her Hebrew name was Hadassah. She was an orphan from the tribe of Benjamin. She lived among the Jewish exiles in Persia, raised by her first cousin, Mordecai. He was a minor government official, under the rule of the current King of Persia—Xerxes. So, most likely our story for today takes place about 500 years before the birth of Christ...

Vashti, the queen of Persia, embarrassed the king at a party, and he divorced her. He needed, then, to select a new queen. Women from all over the empire were selected and given a 12-month beauty treatment. After that 'year of the spa,' a different woman from this bunch was sent to appear before the king one at a time. When Esther's turn came the next morning ... *she became queen!* Now, I'm sure that if the king had known that she was Jewish, she wouldn't have received her crown. But Mordecai had told her to keep her faith and ethnicity a secret...

To make a long story short (see Esther for the complete story), Mordecai got in trouble one day for not bowing down to a higher-ranking palace official named Haman. Mordecai was a Jew and Haman was an Amalekite—two parties who had been warring for years. The lack of respect angered Haman to the point that he went to the king and had him issue an edict to not only punish Mordecai, but to get rid of all the Jews once and for all. (It was political!) Haman even had a gallows built that was 83' tall! Let's pick up with the story right there, as we move to our scripture lesson for today (Esther 4:1-17, NLT)...

When Mordecai learned about all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on burlap and ashes, and went out into the city, crying with a loud and bitter wail. <sup>2</sup> He went as far as the gate of the palace, for no one was allowed to enter the palace gate while wearing clothes of mourning. <sup>3</sup> And as news of the king's decree reached all the provinces, there was great mourning among the Jews. They fasted, wept, and wailed, and many people lay in burlap and ashes.

<sup>4</sup> When Queen Esther's maids and eunuchs came and told her about Mordecai, she was deeply distressed. She sent clothing to him to replace the burlap, but he refused it. <sup>5</sup> Then Esther sent for Hathach, one of the king's eunuchs who had been appointed as her attendant. She ordered him to go to Mordecai and find out what was troubling him and why he was in mourning. <sup>6</sup> So Hathach went out to Mordecai in the square in front of the palace gate.

<sup>7</sup> Mordecai told him the whole story, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. <sup>8</sup> Mordecai gave Hathach a copy of the decree issued in Susa that called for the death of all Jews. He asked Hathach to show it to Esther and explain the situation to her. He also asked Hathach to direct her to go to the king to beg for mercy and plead for her people. <sup>9</sup> So Hathach returned to Esther with Mordecai's message.

<sup>10</sup> Then Esther told Hathach to go back and relay this message to Mordecai: <sup>11</sup> "All the king's officials and even the people in the provinces know that anyone who appears before the king in his inner court without being invited is doomed to die unless the king holds out his gold scepter. And the king has not called for me to come to him for thirty days." <sup>12</sup> So Hathach gave Esther's message to Mordecai.

<sup>13</sup> Mordecai sent this reply to Esther: "Don't think for a moment that because you're in the palace you will escape when all other Jews are killed. <sup>14</sup> If you keep quiet at a time like this, deliverance and relief for the Jews will arise from some other place, but you and your relatives will die. Who knows if perhaps you were made queen for just such a time as this?"

<sup>15</sup> Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: <sup>16</sup> "Go and gather together all the Jews of Susa and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. My maids and I will do the same. And then, though it is against the law, I will go in to see the king. If I must die, I must die." <sup>17</sup> So Mordecai went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.

Folks, here is another *soul alert opportunity!* Mordecai, Esther, and their people had great reasons to **fear**. Haman was going to see to their destruction. But although *God's name is not mentioned once in the book of Esther*, God's presence and providence are clearly presented! So, what do I want you to remember from today's story? The main thing is this: Always **RALLY SUPPORT TO SHINE FOR GOD**. You can't survive in this world on your own, spiritually or otherwise! So, how do we do that? Here's how God works; first...

**GOD DOESN'T ALLOW US TO LIVE IN A BUBBLE**. Sometimes, Christians have the mistaken idea that once a person gives their life to Christ, everything is going to be champagne & roses ... but, of course, that's simply not true. When Esther found out that the wicked Haman was going to kill her entire race, we read that she was in great distress. And that, folks, is probably an *understatement*; I imagine that she was probably experiencing *complete terror!*

I hope, by now, all of you realize that even Christians can go through some scary times in our lives. Jesus told his disciples, "I have told you this so that you will have peace by

being united to me. The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world” (John 16:33)!

Esther, I believe, would have appreciated those words. We need to hang onto them too. The psalmist also wrote about *fearful surroundings*. He said,

“Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me. You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies. You anoint my head with oil; my cup overflows” (Psalm 23:4-5, NIV).

God’s word lets us know what Esther learned in her situation: **God doesn’t allow us to live in a bubble.** But, even though we go through ‘the stuff of life,’ we can count on God to be there with us!

- He was with Moses when he had choices to make...
- God was with Joseph, helping him run from all-too-convenient evil...
- And, most certainly, God was with Esther as she faced down her fears...

*God*, folks, *is also with you*—no matter what you’re going through in life! So, God doesn’t allow us to live in a bubble ... and we also learn that...

**GOD OFTEN PUTS US IN STRATEGIC PLACES.** We don’t always see God’s purposes when we’re in the midst of fearful times, but later on we’ll see—without a doubt—*God put us in the right place at the right time*. Mordecai told Esther, “Yet who knows—maybe it was for a time like this that you were made queen” (Esther 4:14b)!

‘Anyone remember the movie called *Remember the Titans*—the football movie about a black coach in an integrated school? I believe God put Coach Boone in a strategic place. It was scary; people were throwing rocks through his windows ... endangering both him and his family. He was insulted, threatened, & harassed. But lives were changed among all of the students, their families, and an entire community—regardless of color—because Coach Boone was there ... in the right place, and at the right time...

This week, look for *soul alerts* in your life! Keep your eyes open for *special ways God may be wanting to use you in the lives of others*. Yes, God may permit some fearful times, but he’ll be with you, as he places you strategically. Finally...

**GOD DOESN’T WANT US TO FACE DOWN FEAR ALONE.** Mordecai wanted Esther to go to the king and beg for mercy for the Jewish people; this was scary because of Persian law that said: “If you go before the king uninvited, you will be put to death—no exceptions!” So, what does Esther do as this ‘soul alert opportunity’ comes her way? How does she face down her fears in order to do God’s will? Esther didn’t do it alone, did she? Esther called on Mordecai & others to join her (fasting, prayer for three days); by doing this, *she not only enlisted the help of others who loved her, but she invited God right smack into the middle of the situation too!*

What’s the point? As we make our way through life, as we learn to be more than survivors in this place God has planted us, *we can’t go it alone!* **Christianity’s not a**

***solo sport!*** It's more like Olympic hockey, rather than Olympic figure skating. We're a part of Christ's team. Being a Christian means we're...

- Members of God's family ...
- Sheep in his flock ...
- Branches on his vine ...
- Parts of his body ...

We're a *community* together. Esther learned that; we need to learn that too. And, there's one more thing that I think we can learn from Esther's story...

**Sometimes our ability to shine for God comes from the support of people we least expect.** Consider this...

Like any good mother, when Karen found out another baby was on the way, she did what she could to help her 3-year-old son, Michael, prepare for a new sibling. They found out the new baby was going to be a girl, so Michael began to sing to his new baby sister night after night, day after day, in Mommy's tummy. He was building a bond of love with his sister before they even met...

Though Karen's pregnancy progressed normally, the labor pains (contractions) soon came, and then delivery. Some serious complications arose during delivery, however, and Karen wondered if she might have to have a C-section. Finally, after a long struggle, Michael's little sister was born in the hospital at Morristown, Tennessee ... but she was in very serious condition. With it's siren howling, the ambulance rushed the infant to the neonatal intensive care unit at St. Mary's Hospital, in Knoxville...

Days passed slowly. The little girl got worse. The pediatrician had to tell the parents there was little hope and to expect the worst. So, Karen and her husband had gone so far as to contact the local cemetery about a burial plot. They had a special room fixed up for their new baby in their house, ... and now they were having to make plans for a funeral instead...

Michael, while all of this was going on, kept begging his parents to let him see his sister. "I want to sing to her," he kept saying. Week 2 in intensive care looked as though a funeral would come before the week was out. Michael kept nagging his parents about singing to his sister, but everyone knows children aren't allowed in intensive care!

Finally, though, Karen decided to take Michael anyway—whether they liked it or not. If he didn't see his sister now, he may never get to see her alive. They dressed Michael in an over-sized scrub suit and marched him into ICU. He looked like a walking laundry basket! The head nurse recognized him as a child and immediately yelled, "Get that kid out of here now! No children are allowed!" Well, the *mama bear* rose up strong in Karen and the usually mild-mannered lady glared at the head nurse's face, her lips a firm line, and stated, "He's not leaving here until he sees his sister!" And they marched right over to her bed...

Michael gazed over the side of the bed at his sister—the tiny infant who was losing the battle for her life. After just a moment, the 3-year-old Michael began to sing to her ... just as he'd done while she was in her mother's womb. "You are my sunshine, my only sunshine, you make me happy when skies are gray."

Instantly the baby seemed to respond. Her pulse rate began to calm down and become steady ... maybe for the first time since her birth. “Keep on singing, Michael,” his mother encouraged him with tears in her eyes.

“You never know dear, how much I love you, please don’t take my sunshine away.” As Michael sang to his sister, the baby’s ragged, strained breathing became as smooth as a kitten’s purr. “Keep on singing, Sweetheart.” “The other night, dear, as I lay sleeping, I dreamed I held you in my arms.”

Michael’s little sister began to relax as rest—healing rest—seemed to sweep over her. “Keep on singing, Michael.” Tears had now begun to stream down the face of that bossy head nurse. “You are my sunshine, my only sunshine. Please don’t take my sunshine away....”

The next day, the little girl was well enough to go home...

- *Woman’s Day* magazine called it “The Miracle of a Brother’s Song.”
- The medical staff just called it ‘a miracle.’
- Karen called it ‘a miracle of God’s love.’

Who would’ve known God would send another child to be a part of the team to bring her little girl back to life? The ability to shine for God is sometimes given to us by the support of those we least expect! Folks, remember: God doesn’t allow us to live in a bubble ... and God often puts *us* in strategic places, just like Esther (*just like Michael*) ... and God doesn’t want us to face down fear alone. Finally, support sometimes comes from those we least expect...

**We need to rally together & support one another to shine for God!** As we used to say on the high school football team when we were rallying together, “Huddle Up!” To be more than survivors in this world God has placed us in, we need to ‘huddle up,’ support one another, and allow God to shine through us all!