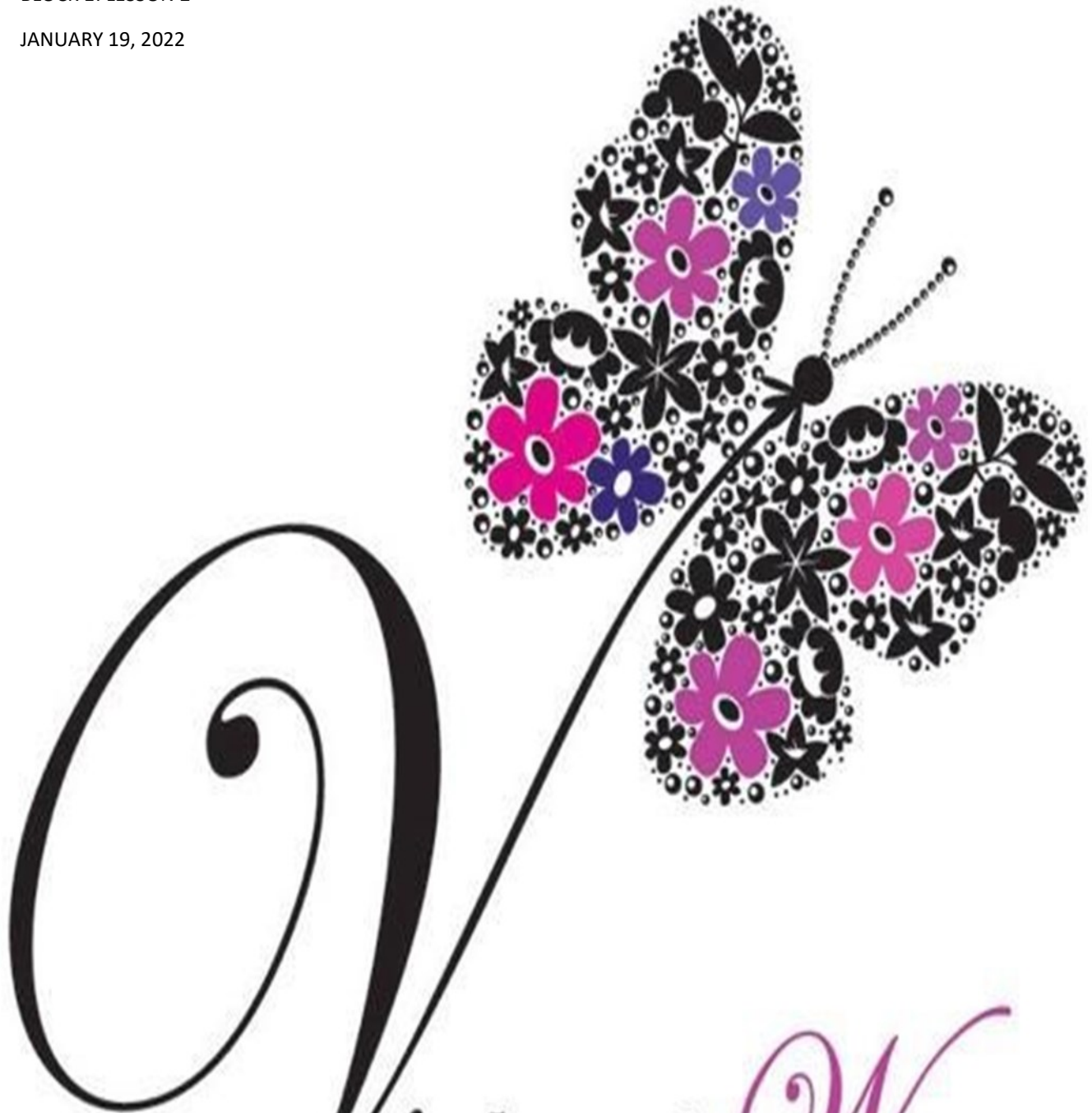


# FAMILY COMMUNITY CHURCH

## *Women of Purpose*

BLOCK 1: LESSON 2

JANUARY 19, 2022



*virtuous Women*

## WEEK 2 - COURAGE: ESTHER

“A ship in harbor is safe, but that is not what ships are built for.” – John Shedd

Courage marks the heroes and heroines of our favorite stories. Whether from the Bible, childhood fairy tales, or modern movies, we love those ordinary people who boldly take a stand to face down life’s “giants.”

What is it exactly that qualifies some people as exceptionally courageous? Clinical psychologist Melanie Greenberg, PhD, identifies six distinct ways we characterize courage:

1. Feeling fear yet choosing to act
2. Following your heart
3. Persevering in the face of adversity
4. Standing up for what is right
5. Expanding your horizons; letting go of the familiar
6. Facing suffering with dignity or faith

As you study Esther’s story again today, consider which of these characteristics of courage she demonstrated. Ask yourself: Which ones do I need to cultivate?

## JUST SAY NO?

**Skim Esther 4:5-11** from our previous study to recall Mordecai's request of Esther and her hesitation.

Esther already had reason to feel she didn't belong and wasn't entitled to be queen. She held a secret: She was a Jew in exile and an orphan, living in a Persian palace in the role of queen. Now she was facing a bully determined to murder the cousin who raised her and wipe out all her people. The clock was ticking. And her cousin, Mordecai, asked her to go before the king and plead for mercy to save the Jews. But there were so many reasons not to.

Put yourself in Esther's place. What might be some of the reasons not to comply with Mordecai's request?

Lots of reasons probably went through Esther's head. She'd have to reveal her identity. She could be banished from the court. Haman could take revenge on her. She could be executed. She could fail.

## INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE ZONE

Regardless of the reasons, Esther needed to move from her safe spot to take action. She needed to step outside her comfort zone to make a difference. It would take courage.

How would you define "comfort zone"? How easily do you move outside of yours?

What is something God is calling you to do that will require you to step outside of that zone?

## NOW OR LATER

When it comes to parenting, we sometimes hear about aiming for “first-time obedience” or “immediate obedience.” The point is, the parent shouldn’t have to ask twice; the child should immediately carry out what he or she has been told to do. Esther did what Mordecai asked, but she didn’t jump right up and run to the king’s chambers. In fact, she did all these things first:

- Called on all the Jews to fast and pray for her for three days (4:15-16);
- Approached the king and invited him and Haman to a banquet the same day (5:1-4);
- At that banquet, invited the king and Haman to another banquet the next day (5:5-8).

Was Esther procrastinating? Or was she being smart and deliberate in planning her strategy?

**There is a difference between being courageous and being careless.** Endless deliberation can become simple procrastination that prevents us from ever taking action. On the other hand, there is a place for adequate prayer, planning, and preparation.

**Read Esther 7:1-6a.** What actions did Esther take that were surely outside her comfort zone?

## NO TURNING BACK

When fear tells us to play it safe, God calls us to choose courage and step outside our comfort zone to do what is right. To answer God's call and choose courage is to walk right into the thing we fear regardless of the cost. Courage keeps us moving toward obedience, trembling but resolute.

Consider Isaiah's prophecy concerning Jesus and the courageous obedience He would display in the face of suffering. Underline any phrase below that shows determination to obey God in the face of terror. Circle the one that most inspires you to emulate His courage.

"The Lord God has opened my ear,

and I was not rebellious;

I did not turn back.

I gave my back to those who beat me,

and my cheeks to those

who tore out my beard.

I did not hide my face from scorn and spitting.

The Lord God will help me;

therefore I have not been humiliated;

therefore I have set my face like flint,

and I know I will not be put to shame." - Isaiah 50:5-7

**Read Esther 7:6b-10.** When Esther acted with courage, what happened to the things she might have feared, such as revealing her identity, Haman’s revenge, being banished, and being executed?

The God who calls us to courageous obedience does not leave us to succeed or fail on our own. He is the same God who promises, “I am with you always” (Matt. 28:20). As we obey, He acts to do what only He can do. He can engineer the outcome of circumstances and the timing of events (Ex. 14; Josh. 10:1-15). He can sway people’s hearts (Gen. 39:21; Ex. 3:21; 9:12; 10:1,27; 11:10; 12:36; 14:8; Josh. 11:20). He can solve problems in ways we could never imagine. When we see no possible solution, He makes a way. Ours is a mountain-moving God (Job 9:4-5).

#### FINAL IMPACT

Esther now stood in an in-between place. With Haman out of the picture, it was like a movie where the danger seems to be over, but then you realize it’s not. She had delivered her message unscathed. But there was still an irreversible decree quickly approaching. The king’s order had been given to kill all Jews in the kingdom on the thirteenth day of the twelfth month, the month of Adar (3:12-13). Once the king issued a decree sealed with his signet ring, it could not be revoked. The clock was ticking, and even King Xerxes couldn’t stop his own decree.

Would Esther risk everything to do the right thing—the courageous thing—and still fail to accomplish what she set out to do? Success is not always guaranteed to the courageous. But it’s nearly impossible to make an impact, indeed to leave a legacy, if we don’t move outside our comfort zone. Esther chapters 8–10 reveal how Esther’s courageous actions did succeed and establish a legacy in the process.

#### **Here’s how events unfolded:**

Esther begged the king to revoke his decree (8:3-6)

Xerxes couldn’t change his decree but offered to let Esther and Mordecai write a new one additionally (8:7-8)

Mordecai wrote a new decree, sealed by the king, allowing the Jews to protect themselves against attack (8:9-14)

Mordecai became more powerful, and the Jews became feared in the land (8:15-17; 9:1-4)

The Jews struck down their enemies on the day of attack, killing five hundred men (9:5-10)

Esther not only survived but gained respect and reward for her bravery. More than that, Esther's willingness to risk her life to save her people left a legacy that long outlived her. On the two days following the attack, the Jews rested and celebrated with a day of feasting and joy (9:17). Those two days became an annual celebration of feasting and gift giving to commemorate the time when the Jews escaped slaughter at the hands of their enemies. The feast was named "Purim," which means 'lots,' a reference to the lots Haman cast to determine which day he would have the Jews slaughtered (3:7).<sup>11</sup>

"The Jews bound themselves, their descendants, and all who joined with them to a commitment that they would not fail to celebrate these two days each and every year according to the written instructions and according to the time appointed. These days are remembered and celebrated by every generation, family, province, and city, so that these days of Purim will not lose their significance in Jewish life and their memory will not fade from their descendants."

ESTHER 9:27-28

Esther's legacy lives to this day as Jews still celebrate Purim. Your brave steps, big and small, will also leave a legacy of courage for those who come behind you.

IN YOUR OWN WORDS: Based on what you've studied today, how would you further define courage?

IN YOUR OWN LIFE: What big or small steps of courage is God calling you to take today?