

Discussion Guide

Date: 11/8/2026
Sermon Title: How can I learn to be courageous?
Scripture: Esther 4:12-17

This discussion guide is a layout to be used with a group or class. We have included opening and closing prayers to start and end your group. The guide may be used for personal or family reflection as well.

OPENING PRAYER:
Gracious and loving God, thank you for gathering us together and for the opportunities you give us to grow in faith and become more like Jesus. We recognize that following you is not always easy. There are moments when we are uncertain, uncomfortable, afraid, or unsure of what to do next. As we look at Esther's story, help us recognize that courage is not the absence of fear but the willingness to trust you in the middle of it. Open our hearts and minds as we talk together today. May our conversation help us become more willing and more able to follow Jesus wherever you lead. In the name of Christ, we pray. Amen.

BIG IDEA:
Courage is not the absence of fear or uncertainty. Courage is the willingness to step forward in faith when we recognize that our decisions matter, even when the risks are real and the outcomes are not guaranteed.

OPENING THOUGHT: COURAGE IN THE HARD MOMENTS
We often celebrate courageous leaders after the fact. We tell stories about people who stood up, spoke out, took a risk, or made a difficult decision. We admire their willingness to do what was right, even when it was difficult. But courage is much harder when we are the ones standing in the moment.

It is one thing to encourage someone else to take a risk. It is another thing when we are the ones who must make the decision, carry the responsibility, and live with the possible consequences. Leadership often brings us to these moments. We may have to speak when silence would be easier, make a decision when there is no clear answer, or step into a situation when we would rather remain comfortable.

Esther's story reminds us that courage is often discovered in the tension between what is comfortable and what is necessary. She did not begin her story looking for a position of influence or an opportunity to become a hero. Yet, when the moment came, she had to decide what she would do with the position and influence she had been given.

QUESTIONS TO BEGIN:
1. Think about someone you would describe as courageous. What was it about their actions or character that makes you use that word?
2. Do you think courageous people are naturally brave, or do they learn to become courageous over time?

THE BACKGROUND TO OUR STORY:
The Book of Esther takes place during the Persian Empire, during the reign of King Ahasuerus (commonly

identified with Xerxes I, who ruled from 486–465 BC). Many Jewish people were living in exile and scattered throughout the Persian Empire rather than in their homeland. Esther was a young Jewish woman who had become queen of Persia. However, her Jewish identity was not publicly known.

The crisis begins when Haman, a powerful official in the king's court, becomes enraged with Mordecai, Esther's cousin and guardian. Haman develops a plan to destroy the Jewish people throughout the empire. Through manipulation and political influence, he persuades the king to issue an order authorizing their destruction.

When Mordecai learns what is happening, he sends word to Esther. He challenges her to recognize that her position as queen may be more than an opportunity for personal security. It may be an opportunity to save her people. This brings us to Esther 4:12–17.

READING THE SCRIPTURE: ESTHER 4:12–17

Invite someone in the group to read the passage aloud. If possible, have another person read it a second time, listening for words or phrases that stand out.

Pay attention to three movements in the passage:

Verses 12–14: Mordecai challenges Esther to see beyond her own security.
Verses 15–16: Esther moves from hesitation to discernment and action, calling for a communal fast.
Verse 17: Mordecai responds to Esther's leadership and carries out her instructions.

1. What stands out to you most about Esther's conversation with Mordecai? Is there a particular verse or phrase that catches your attention?
2. Why do you think Esther hesitated to approach the king? What were the legitimate risks she faced?
3. Mordecai tells Esther that perhaps she has come to her royal position "for just such a time as this." How do you understand that statement? How might it have changed the way Esther viewed her position and responsibility?

MAKING IT PERSONAL:

1. Have you ever faced a situation where doing the right thing was difficult because there was something significant at stake? What made the decision difficult?
2. Why is it sometimes easier to encourage someone else to take a risk than it is to take that risk ourselves?
3. Where might you be tempted to choose comfort, security, or silence instead of stepping into a difficult situation?
4. What is the difference between being courageous and simply being impulsive or reckless? How do prayer, wisdom, and community help us discern the difference?

SERMON QUESTIONS:

1. The sermon identifies two common misunderstandings about courage: charging recklessly like Simba (Lion King), or assuming courage is something we simply do not possess. Which of these two tendencies do you relate to more? Why?
2. Pastor Allison shares how Esther spent five years in the palace quietly building courage through unseen, daily acts before her defining moment arrived. What small, unnoticed acts of courage might God be calling you to practice right now that could prepare you for a larger moment ahead?
3. Pastor Allison describes courage not as a quality you either have or lack, but as a spiritual discipline that grows over time. How does reframing courage this way change the way you think about your own capacity to act bravely in difficult situations?

4. Esther initially refused Mordecai's request before ultimately saying yes. Have you ever had a moment where your community pushed you toward courage when you were reluctant, and what was the outcome of that experience?
5. Mordecai's words in Esther 4:14 suggest that Esther's position was not accidental but purposeful. How do you discern whether a difficult or unexpected circumstance in your own life might be a divine invitation to courageous action?

REFLECTION AND APPLICATION:

1. Esther's courageous acts during the five years in the palace were largely unseen. How do you feel about the idea that some of our most important acts of courage may never be publicly recognized? How does that challenge or encourage you?
2. Can you think of a time when acting on behalf of others gave you courage you would not have found if you were acting only for your own benefit?
3. Esther called on her community to fast and pray with her to help bring her courage. Who can you call on to bring you courage? Where in your life currently do you need courage?

COURAGE AS A MEANS OF GRACE:

Wesley emphasized the importance of the means of grace through practices which we open ourselves to God's transforming work. These include prayer, Scripture, worship, Holy Communion, fasting, and Christian community. Notice that Esther does not approach this moment alone. She calls for a communal fast. Her preparation reminds us that courage is often formed before the crisis arrives. We become people who can respond faithfully in difficult moments by developing spiritual practices in ordinary moments.

United Methodist theologian Randy Maddox, in his work on Wesley's understanding of responsible grace, helps us understand that God's grace enables a genuine human response. We are not passive recipients of grace; we are invited to participate in God's transforming work. Esther's story illustrates this beautifully. Mordecai challenges her; Esther calls her community together, and the community participates in preparing for what comes next. Courage is personal, but it is rarely something we develop alone.

CLOSING PRAYER:

God of courage and compassion, thank you for the example of Esther and for reminding us that our lives, our influence, and our opportunities matter. Forgive us for the times we have chosen comfort over faithfulness, silence over speaking up, or our own security over the needs of others. Give us the courage to do what is right, even when it is difficult. Give us discernment when the decisions are complicated, patience when the answers are unclear, and humility to seek the wisdom of others. Help us remember that we do not walk alone. Your grace goes before us, your Spirit works within us, and your people surround us. Send us into the week willing to take the next faithful step. Lord, make us willing and able. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

WAYS TO RESPOND:

Choose ONE of the following practices to focus on this week:

1. Identify one small act of courage God may be calling you to this week. It does not have to be dramatic. Commit to taking that step and share it with the group so others can pray for you.
2. Think of someone in your life who is facing a moment that requires courage. Reach out to them this week and let them know you are praying for them and walking with them.
3. Begin a personal practice of prayer or fasting before a difficult situation you are anticipating. Follow Esther's example of bringing your fear and need before God and inviting others to stand with you.

4. Consider where you are right now in your life, your work, your relationships, or your community. Ask the question Mordecai asked Esther: Is it possible that you have been placed here for such a time as this? Spend time in prayer listening for God's answer this week.