

Who Are the People of God?

Focus Scripture

Esther 7:1-6, 9-10,
9:20-22

PURPOSE To explore the cost of belonging to God’s community.

Lesson Preparation

- ❑ Read Esther 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-22, and biblical background for September 30. If possible read either the entire story of Esther in the Bible, taking time to enjoy the humor and drama of the story, or read the story outline. Read the information on Purim in the Unit 1 *Introduction*.
- ❑ Set worship table with a green cloth, votive candle, Unit 1 logo (#4), a Bible, and offering basket.
- ❑ Bring CD player and *Sunshine* CDs.
- ❑ Write the closing prayer on newsprint.
- ❑ Choose the option(s) you would like to use for Integrating the Theme. Prepare and bring the necessary materials.
- ❑ Check the birthday list.
- ❑ Pray about what is happening this week in the lives of members of your group. What choices might they be facing? What choices are you facing in your own life right now?

1

Opening

Welcome everyone, especially any newcomers. Invite a class member to **light the candle** on your worship table, saying “We light this candle to remind us that God is with us.”

Birthdays, Offering

Prayer: Explain that this prayer is about hard choices – you will give one half of a choice and people can say what they think is the opposite. For example: “We choose between good and (group members might suggest bad, evil etc.). Leave lots of time, and don’t assume there is only one possible response.



Loving God, sometimes we have to make hard choices. Sometimes we have to choose sides.

We choose between good and,
fair and,
kind and,
true and,
peace and,
love and

Help us in our choices, as we try to live as your people. Amen.

2

Introducing the Theme

Scenario: Hard Choices

(Present the following scenario and ask the group what they would do in this situation). You are trying to be nice to a new person at school. The others say this person is a bit weird, and they don’t want you to be friends with them. The new person asks if you will go to the park with them next Saturday afternoon, and you say yes. Later that day your best friends phone to ask if you are busy on Saturday afternoon, because they have tickets for a movie you really want to see. What will you do? What might your choices be? (To

tell your friends you are going to the park with the new friend; to lie and say your parents won’t let you go; cancel plans with the new friend; go to the movie, don’t bother showing up at the park; or?)

Have you ever had to make a really hard choice like that? What made it so hard? Sometimes, choosing is very difficult or risky, and we feel caught in the middle. (Invite suggestions of examples of these kinds of choices.)

3

Exploring the Theme

The Story of Esther

In the story we will hear today, Esther had to choose whether to speak up and help her people or to remain in safety, as the queen. It was a big risk, and she might have been killed. The story reminds of us that God cares for us and helps us, just as God helped Esther and her people. Jewish people celebrate this story every year in a special holiday called Purim.

Explain that as you tell the story of Esther, they are to listen carefully. (See places marked on story resource sheet) When this story is told at Purim, every time the name of Haman is heard – who is the villain in the story – Jewish children are to boo or hiss. Practice making a sound like that together (“boo/hiss”). Then practice the sounds for the other words: king (“da-ta-da-da”, a sound like trumpet fanfare) and Esther (“hurray!”, a cheer). As I read the story, listen carefully for these words and make the sounds.

Discussing the Passage: Esther

How did Esther use her power to help her people? (She asked people to pray for her and then went to talk to the king.) What risks did she take? (She approached the king and might have been put to death for doing so.) Do you know of people in our time who have done

this? (e.g. Martin Luther King Jr., Craig Kielberger, Malala) What risks did they face when they stood up for something they believed in or against something they thought was unfair or wrong? I wonder what can give a person courage and strength to do this? What gave Esther strength to act with courage? (Esther prayed for God’s help and asked the people to pray for her too.)

A Time for Wondering

(Ask these open-ended questions not to find the “right answer” but to explore their thoughts, ideas and feelings.)

- I wonder how powerful you feel to make a difference in the world?
- I wonder what kinds of things do you pray for when you need God’s help? How does God help? (This might lead into a discussion of how we can ask for God’s help, but that God’s care and love are often lived out in our own actions and in the actions of other people. For example, when we pray for someone who is unhappy, we also have to show our care to that person. This may be a new concept for junior level children who sometimes think of God as magician or puppeteer. Often God’s help comes to us through another person.)

4

Integrating the Theme

Option A: Celebration

Materials: party decorations, tablecloth, flowers etc. and a treat to share (e.g. juice and cookies)

Have someone read the description of the Feast of Purim (Esther 9:20-28) Why do Jewish people celebrate Purim? (To celebrate being saved by God from death) What two important things happen at the feast of Purim? (give gifts to one another and to the poor; give thanks to God) Let’s have a celebration of God’s love and care for us! Decorate your room/set the table for a party. Share some treats together. God loves and cares for us, just as God cared for Esther and her people. (Don’t forget to give thanks for the treats and share these with others.)

Option B: “I Can Make a Difference” Mini Collage

Materials: construction or heavy stock paper, scissors, glue sticks, magazines

In advance: Cut sheets of letter-size paper in half.

Invite each person to think about their strengths. These might be qualities they know they have, or that others have pointed out to them. For example, they might be a good listener, compassionate toward animals, a good leader, organized, know how to make others laugh, creative. Make a small collage about yourself that shows your personal strengths. Cut pictures from magazines that represent your strengths. Arrange these to cover the whole half sheet, allowing these to overlap or fit together. Trim edges. When everyone has finished, invite each person to share theirs. Reflect silently on how you might use these strengths, as Esther did, to make a difference.



5

Closing

Divide the class into 2 groups and have them read alternate lines of the closing prayer.

Prayer:

Group 1: God of love and care

Group 2: Help us your love to share

Group 1: So everyone may feel

Group 2: The love of God is real

Group 1: Help us, risks to take

Group 2: For all your people's sake.

All: Amen.

Story Outline: The Story of Esther

(Pause slightly at words in **bold*** for participants to make the sound.)

Once, long ago, **King*** Xerxes (Zerk sees) ruled over all Persia. One day the **King*** decided to give a splendid banquet. He invited all the men, rich and poor, from the whole city. Queen Vashti, his beautiful wife, gave a banquet for the women.

On the seventh day of the banquet, the **King*** was feeling very jolly after drinking much wine. He ordered Queen Vashti to come dance before the men so he could show off her beauty. Queen Vashti did not want to dance before a group of drunken men and she refused. The **King*** was furious and asked his advisors what to do. "Banish her," they said, "otherwise all the women will stop doing what their husbands tell them to." That was the custom in those days. So the **King*** did as they advised and banished Vashti from the Kingdom.

Afterwards, the **King*** could not stop thinking about Queen Vashti. His advisors realized how sad he was and decided to bring the most beautiful women in all the kingdom to the **King*** so that he could choose a new queen.

The advisors searched everywhere for the most beautiful women in Persia. One of the women they chose was a poor but beautiful Jewish woman named Esther. She lived with her old uncle, Mordecai, because her parents had both died in the war when she was a baby, when some of her people had been brought as captives to live in Persia. Mordecai had raised **Esther** and loved her like his own daughter.

Esther was sent to the palace with all the other beautiful women. There, they were dressed in elegant clothes, with fine makeup, and truly you cannot imagine a more impressive sight. But the beautiful **Esther** won the heart of **King*** Xerxes, and he chose her as his queen.

Some years later, the **King*** promoted a man named **Haman** to be Prime Minister, and ordered that everyone show their respect to **Haman** by bowing to him. Everyone did as the **King*** commanded, except for Mordecai. He refused, saying, "I am a Jew. I cannot bow to **Haman**. I bow only to God."

Haman was furious. He decided to do more than punish Mordecai. He made plans to kill every Jew in the whole empire. **Haman** told the **King*** "There is a certain group of people living in your Kingdom who do not obey your laws. Have them destroyed, I beg you." So the **King*** agreed, and **Haman** sent a proclamation to all the cities and provinces in all of Persia, announcing that on a certain day all the Jews would be killed.

When Mordecai heard the proclamation, he dressed up in sackcloth and went through the city wailing and weeping until he got to the gates of the palace, where he sat down. **Esther's** servants saw Mordecai there and told her. **Esther** sent a servant

to Mordecai. The servant came back with a message from Mordecai, telling her what **Haman** had done, and begging **Esther** to go before the **King*** and plead with him to have mercy on her people.

Poor **Esther** was very frightened. "If I do this, I might die," she thought. She sent another message to Mordecai: "There is a law that if anyone goes into the **King*** without being summoned then that person must die." There was only one way around the law. If the **King*** held up his golden scepter, then that person's life would be spared.

Mordecai sent a message back to **Esther**, telling her that she might die anyway, along with all the rest of the Jews. Just because she was living in the palace that didn't mean she would be safe. In fact being queen might make it possible for God to save the people through her. So **Esther** decided to do what Mordecai asked. She asked him to spread the word among all the Jews to fast and pray for her. She too would fast and pray for three days and then go to the **King***.

On the third day she put on her royal robe and went before the **King***. There was a gasp of horror throughout the court as she entered. Then the **King*** lifted up his golden scepter and **Esther** went forward. "Whatever it is that you want, I will give it to you," he said.

"All I ask," she said, "is that you and **Haman** come to a banquet tonight that I am preparing in your honour." The **King*** agreed, and that night he and **Haman** went to dine with Queen **Esther**. **Haman** was very proud and pleased to be invited to so special an occasion.

At the banquet, the **King*** again asked **Esther** "What is it you want?" Queen **Esther** answered, "I would like you and **Haman** to come again tomorrow night to a banquet that I am preparing in your honour."

At the second banquet, the **King*** again asked her "What is it you want? Ask anything and you shall have it." This time Queen **Esther** answered, "If it please your Majesty, my wish is that my people might live. My people and I have been sold into slavery. If it were nothing more than being sold into slavery, I wouldn't have troubled you about it, but as it is, we are all to be killed."

"What?" exclaimed the **King***, "Who dares to do such a thing? Show me the man."

"He is right here," said **Esther**. "It is **Haman**."

"Have him hanged!" ordered **King*** Xerxes.

So **Haman** was hanged that very night. The **King*** gave **Esther** and Mordecai all **Haman's** property, and they and all their people were saved. It was a time of great rejoicing for the Jewish people, because once again God had saved them.