

Who Are the People of God?

Youth issue:
Making Choices

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, biblical background for September 30, and the information on Purim in the Unit 1 Introduction.
- Set worship table with a green cloth, candle, Unit 1 logo (#4), a Bible, and offering basket.
- Print the opening and closing prayer on newsprint
- Make copies of the "All God's Children" drama resource sheet. Organize any props you need (*see Exploring the Theme*). Bring Bibles.
- Choose the option(s) you would like to use for Integrating the Theme. Prepare and bring the necessary materials.
- Check birthdays.
- Pray for the young people in your church knowing that, like us, the most difficult choices they make are outside the walls of the church.

1



Opening

Welcome everyone, especially any newcomers. Ask how their week has been.

Ask a volunteer to **light the candle**, saying "We light this candle to remind us that God is always with us."

Birthdays, Offering

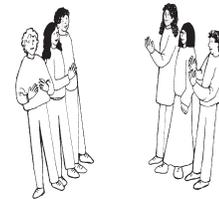
Prayer: Loving God, we make a lot of choices in our lives every day. Help us always to consider how our choices will affect others and consider what choices you would want us to make. Amen.

2

Introducing the Theme

Either/Or Exercise

Sometimes a choice comes down to one of two alternatives. Sometimes both outcomes are appealing; sometimes neither. However, people are often forced to choose. In the following exercise consider the two options and make a choice. Move to the left side of the room if you choose the first option and to the right side if you choose the second option.



Which of the following is most like you:

- | | | |
|------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| thinking of the future | or | thinking of the present? |
| talking | or | doing? |
| wanting change | or | fearing change? |

Which change is more difficult to adjust to:

- | | | |
|----------------------|----|-------------------|
| a new school | or | a new house? |
| moving to a new city | or | taking a new job? |
| a new church | or | new neighbours? |
| divorce | or | death? |

When finished, talk about the experience. Were some of the choices difficult to make? Did anyone want to just stand in the middle of the room for some? What makes a decision hard? When we make choices, what do we

have to consider? (How will the decision affect others? What are the consequences of making that choice? etc.) What are some of the choices you are facing now that feel critically important?

3

Exploring the Theme

The scripture passage today is about a young woman named Esther who was forced to make a very difficult choice. (*Hand out copies of the "All God's Children" dramatic reading resource sheet and ask for volunteers to read the parts of Andrea, Jennifer, Erin, Jason and Mike. Be as creative with this as you want. Bring throw cushions for the group to sit on, a bowl of popcorn, remote control, etc. for props.*)

When you have heard the dramatic reading, hand out Bibles and continue as follows:

Have everyone turn to Esther 4:6-14 and take turns reading the next part of the story. What choice do you think Esther will make? What could happen to her? If they heard the passage read in church before coming to class they may already know the ending. If this is the case, ask them to list all of the choices Esther could have made. How would the story have ended if this were the case?

Then have a volunteer read Esther 4:15-16. What did Esther do to gain strength to make this difficult choice?

Then continue with volunteers reading Esther 5:1-7; 7:1-6, 9-10; 9:20-26. What do Jews call their annual festival in commemoration of this story? (vs 26) How do they celebrate? (verse 22b)

Discussing the Passage: Esther

Who was the hero, heroine, and villain in this story? Why do you say that? 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 taken risks like this or stood up in an unjust situation? (e.g. Martin Luther King Jr., Craig Kielberger, Malala, youth after highschool shootings in Parkland, Florida) What gave Esther strength to act with courage? (Esther prayed for God's help and asked the people to pray for her too.) Have you or someone you know had to make a difficult decision like Esther? Do things always turn out as well as they did in Esther's case?

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 what gives you strength to face difficult decisions?
- I wonder if you ever ask for God's help?
- I wonder how you think God might 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 youth who sometimes think of God as magician or puppeteer. We can help them to see that often God's help comes to us through another person.*)

4

Integrating the Theme

Option A: Paper Bag Drama

In advance: Print "Parable: A story which teaches spiritual truth" on the side of a paper grocery bag. You will need a bag for each group of 3-4 youth in your class. Put approximately 6 different commonplace items such as cooking utensils, items of clothing, a beach towel, empty bottle, a magazine, a plastic garbage bag, a set of keys, etc. in each bag.

Hand out a prepared paper bag to each group. Explain to them that they will have 5 minutes to plan a "drama" that deals with a dilemma that people their age face (i.e. a situation which requires characters to make a difficult choice.) The catch is that they must use **all** of the items found in their paper bags as props in their skits. Regroup after 5 minutes and perform these for each other.

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.



Option C: Follow-up to Last Week's Options

If you used the option “Planning Your Space” or the “Group Service Project” option last week, you may need to use more time this week to follow up on those options and what was started last Sunday.

5

Closing

(Invite everyone to stand in a circle to reflect our community of support and friendship in the midst of the difficult choices we have to face each day.)

Prayer: O God, we thank you for friends and family who support us though difficult decisions; and for Jesus, who showed us how to live and love.
Help us have courage to make faithful choices,
Like Esther and Jesus. Amen.

“All God’s Children” Drama

Cast of Characters:

Jennifer, Erin, Andrea, Jason, Mike

Note: King Xerxes’ name is pronounced Zerk sees.

(Opening Scene: Erin, Andrea, Jason and Mike are gathered in front of the TV waiting for their favorite TV program to begin.)

Jennifer: (*arriving out of breath*) Hi everybody! Am I late? Has it started already?

Jason: Nah, it’s not 11:00 yet. Have a seat Jenn.

Jennifer: (*sitting down*) Oh great! I didn’t want to miss anything! Friday’s show was such a cliffhanger!

Erin: Somebody better fill me in. I missed it on Friday. What happened?

All: YOU DON’T KNOW?

Jennifer: Where do we start?

Jason: Did you ever miss a lot, Erin! Let’s see...

Andrea: You remember King Xerxes, right?

Erin: Yeah – the Persian guy.

Andrea: He turned out to be a real creep.

Jennifer: Yeah – poor Vashiti!

Erin: Vashiti? His wife? What happened?

Well, the king threw a big party and everyone got pretty drunk. Then at one point the guys all decided they wanted some entertainment so King Xerxes called for the queen to come and dance for them.

Jennifer: Naked! Can you believe it?

Andrea: Yeah. He told her to come wearing “only her crown”.

Erin: And *did* she?

Andrea: No way! Are you kidding?

Erin: Well, so what happened then?

Jason: Well Xerxes was really ticked off.

He went off the deep end. All the other guys at the party were making fun of him – saying Vashiti was really in charge not him and that if the King ‘put up with’ that then all of the other wives would start bossing their husbands around, too. So Xerxes divorced Vashiti.

Erin: You’re kidding! Just like that? But he loved Vashiti!

Andrea: Yeah but he cared about what his friends thought more I guess.

Erin: So *then* what happened?

Jason: Then there was a beauty contest to choose a new queen.

Erin: That sounds like a dumb way to choose a queen.

Andrea: Do you remember Esther? Mordecai’s cousin?

Erin: She won?

Jason: Yeah.

Erin: But she’s Jewish! How can a Jewish girl marry a Persian king?

Jennifer: Well, of course, Xerxes doesn’t *know* she’s Jewish. At least not yet anyway.

Mike: Yeah but Haman knows. He found out just at the end of Friday’s episode.

Erin: Haman? Oh no! Poor Esther! He’ll tell King Xerxes for sure. He’s the creepiest, most conniving –

Jennifer: He’s already plotting to kill all the Jews.

Erin: What! Why? Because he found out Esther was a Jew?

Andrea: Not exactly. Well, you know Haman hates Mordecai, right?

Jennifer: Because Mordecai won’t bow to Haman when Haman is in his presence. You’re supposed to bow to officials but Mordecai refuses to.

Haman’s on such an ego-trip! Of course Mordecai doesn’t bow to him. It’s against Jewish law for him to do that – it’d be like worshipping another god. Doesn’t Haman understand that?

Apparently not. He thinks the Jews are disrespectful – a liability to the Persian empire. So he’s going to get rid of them. He’s already tricked King Xerxes into giving him permission to wipe them out.

Erin: What do you mean?

Jennifer: Haman told Xerxes that there was ‘a group of people’ in his empire who were going to try to overthrow him.

Erin: The Jews would never do that! King Xerxes knows that! Mordecai even saved the king’s life once – when that man tried to assassinate him! Why would he think the Jews meant him any harm?

Andrea: Xerxes didn’t know that it was the Jews that Haman was talking about. So he gave Haman his permission to kill all the “subversives.”

Erin: I can’t believe this! What’ll happen to Esther when they find out *she’s* Jewish?

Andrea: I doubt Xerxes would let Esther die – even if he finds out she’s Jewish.

Jennifer: I’m with Andrea. I don’t think he’ll make the same mistake as he made with Vashiti. I think he was really sorry he divorced Vashiti.

Well, Esther knows what Haman is up to anyway. When the decree was issued saying that all the Jews were to be killed Mordecai came to the palace and told Esther. So maybe she’ll do something to stop Haman.

Mike: But what can *she* do? If she admits she’s a Jew she’ll be killed along with the rest of them. If she stands up to the king and tells him he made a mistake by issuing the decree well...just look what happened to Vashiti when she stood up to Xerxes!

Erin: What’s Esther going to do? She’s really between a rock and a hard place! Shhh everybody! It’s starting...