

We may be in a meeting thinking about the things we need to get done at home or at work. We may be sitting in a doctor's office waiting for test results for ourselves or a loved one. We may be alone in our thoughts pondering the meaning of life, our life. Or, we may have just said "yes" to a certain job or event. Whatever the reason, wherever the place, if we are honest with ourselves and others, we have all, at one time or another, raised the question: "Why am I here?"

Esther's story is not shared much today. I am not sure why. Maybe it is because we don't want to hear the full extent of the story, it has some things, images, we are uncomfortable with. Esther is the winner of a beauty contest. A strange beauty contest, but a beauty contest never-the-less. The king was displeased with his former queen. He had thrown a great party and they had feasted for seven days. After seven days of eating and drinking he wants to show off the beauty of his queen. Now, the men were partying in one section of the palace and the queen and the women in another section (she and the women were not left out of the partying). She refused to be displayed. Now, if we are honest, the text probably means that the king wanted to display the queen wearing "only her royal crowns"! Puts a little different twist on her denial, doesn't it?

This cannot be. The king's advisors know that if the word of her disobedience gets out then all the other women in the kingdom will start defying the orders of their husbands. What would happen if this were allowed? Only one solution: get rid of the queen. Banish her from the royal household; take away her title. This will show the women that there are consequences for not obeying. This sounds good to the king and so the edict is written and carried out. Queen Vashti is removed from the presence of the king forever.

Days pass. The king sobers up. He grows lonely. Maybe this was not such a good idea but once written in the laws of Persia and Media it cannot be repealed (Esther 1:19). A new idea: Let's hold a beauty contest. We will gather all the beautiful young women in the kingdom and let the king choose a new queen. Esther, a young Jewish woman, is among the group chosen. At the insistence of her relative, Mordecai, she does not reveal her Jewish heritage. These young women are given beauty treatments, etc. for 12 months before they are invited into the presence of the king. Esther immediately pleased the king's advisor who was heading up the program and she received special treatments and food.

Now, we have to be honest with Scripture and the story. The regimen is that the young women go in the evening to the king's presence and leave in the morning! If the king is not pleased, the young woman is sent off to another harem where she would only return at the king's request (2:14). Esther pleased the king and she was made queen.

The story continues with the chief advisor to the king, Haman, devising a plot to get rid of the Jews in the kingdom. He is upset with Esther's relative, Mordecai. The tradition is that his position as head of the king's advisors means that all people will bow as he passes by. Mordecai refuses to bow. Haman is upset with this and with the whole Jewish people. He goes to the king and tells of people who are different. They do not follow after the gods of the king; they do not eat the same kind of food.

They are not as we are. Isn't it amazing how things have not changed? We still want to get rid of those who are different from us. We are afraid of those who are not like us.

The edict goes out. On such and such day the people of the kingdom will be allowed to kill all the Jews. Rather dumb to announce the date, in my estimation. Imagine General Eisenhower announcing ahead of time the date of D-Day! Word gets to Esther of the edict. What can she do? There are laws even within the king's court. No one can approach the king without permission. Doing so would result in death. She does not know what she can do. Mordecai warns her that her position as queen will not save her or her family and "*who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this*" (4:14b).

Our stories may not be as dramatic as Esther's. Yet, there are those moments when we are there "*for such a time as this*". Those moments when we walk beside, mentor, or strengthen another. Was this not Mordecai's role in Esther's life? He gave her the encouragement to live out her faith. Esther proposes a three-day fast and prayer and then she stands before the king and eventually saves her people. We need others who walk beside us to see the potential and possibilities that we may not see. These people are often in the shadows but they are ones who give us the strength to go and do.

I remember a story (I think it was in one of the Chicken Soup for the Soul books) of a mother who was worried about her young son. He was trying out for the school play and she knew there was no hope of his getting a part. She was concerned about how disappointed he would be, and dreaded his coming home. He came home excited. She wondered if he got a part. He said "no" but he was chosen to be one who would be in the audience to "stand and cheer!" We all need our Mordecai's.

Now you may know this but Diane is not into sports. Unfortunately her two sons are. She knew that being present at their games would be important for them. They knew she was there cheering for them even if she didn't know what inning the basketball game was in. Her being there was all they needed.

I know some people in Mountlake Terrace although I have never met them. You continue to tell their stories. Their stories continue to give you strength, hope and encouragement. There was something about their lives and how they lived out their faith that continues to inspire. They were your Mordecai. Douglas Copeland (a non-Christian writer) says in one of his books that the world will not end in some great catastrophe but the world will end when we stop telling each other stories. The writer of Hebrews calls these "a great cloud of witnesses." We are surrounded by their stories and how they were called in their time, "*for such a time as this.*"

We need to hear the stories. But, we often are too busy. The agenda needs to be completed. The job needs to get done. We have forgotten our need to share and hear the stories. We have begun to neglect an important part of who we are: our stories. Is this not what the Psalmist was referring to when he asked God to "*turn your heart to me*" (Ps. 31:2). God, listen to my story. Is this not what prayer is: our telling God our stories.

We do not know when God will use us but we do know that God will use us. It probably won't be as dramatic as Esther's story but we will be used of God. Maybe

the child you are helping to learn to read as you volunteer at Cedar Way School will one day be the president of the United States. Maybe the child in VBS whose story you listen to will become something beyond expectation. Or, maybe they will just become a strong person of faith who influences the lives of others because you cared and listened. Who knows? We may change the course of history because we listened. Because we are here *“for such a time as this.”*

The first edition of Chicken Soup for the Soul carries the following story from John W. Schlatter, it is entitled “A Simple Gesture.”

“Mark was walking home from school one day when he noticed the boy ahead of him had tripped and dropped all of the books he was carrying, along with two sweaters, a baseball bat, a glove and a small tape recorder. Mark knelt down and helped the boy pick up the scattered articles. Since they were going the same way, he helped to carry part of the burden. As they walked Mark discovered the boy’s name was Bill, that he loved video games, baseball and history, that he was having a lot of trouble with his other subjects and that he had just broken up with his girl friend.

They arrived at Bill’s home first and Mark was invited in for a Coke and to watch some television. The afternoon passed pleasantly with a few laughs and some shared small talk, then Mark went home. They continued to see each other around school, had lunch together once or twice, then both graduated from junior high school. They ended up in the same high school where they had brief contacts over the years. Finally the long awaited senior year came, and three weeks before graduation, Bill asked Mark if they could talk.

Bill reminded him of the days years ago when they had first met. ‘Do you ever wonder why I was carrying so many things home that day?’ Bill asked. ‘You see, I cleaned out my locker because I didn’t want to leave a mess for anyone else. I had stored away some of my mother’s sleeping pills and I was going home to commit suicide. But after we spent some time together talking and laughing, I realized that if I had killed myself, I would have missed that time and so many others that might follow. So you see, Mark, when you picked up my books that day, you did a lot more. You saved my life.’”

***“And who knows that you have come to royal position for such a time as this?”***

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Cranfield, Jack & Hansen, Mark Victor, Chicken Soup for the Soul, “A Simple Gesture” by Jack Schlatter, Health Communications, Deerfield Beach, FL, 1993 (p. 35-36)