

celloutlines | week two

These Cell Outlines are written by ALOVE UK. They are available each week from our web site. For more information and other cell resources, visit www.salvationarmy.org.uk/love/resources

ESTHER BIBLE STUDY WEEK TWO

The Persian Times

Millions Spent on Beauty Treatments for 'Persia's Next Queen' Hopefuls

Four hundred young girls are living in the lap of luxury at the taxpayers' expense. These girls, mainly between the ages of 16 and 25 years, have made it through to the palace round of Persia's Next Queen and are currently ensconced in the palace harem. Here they are reported to be undergoing extensive beauty treatments such as regular full body massage, seaweed wraps, ritual body detoxification, facial exfoliation and moisturisers, fragrant oil baths, hair restyling and colouring, full clothing and cosmetic makeovers. Not only that, but these girls are also enjoying a full royal diet in the effort to create the perfect body shape and most healthy skin tone. This will be continuing for at least one year until each girl is ready to come before the King as he searches for his new queen. The question remains... who is paying for such excesses?

Assassination Plot Foiled

An unknown palace worker has uncovered a plot against the King and saved his life. Mordecai, son of Kish, a Jew living in Susa, overheard two palace eunuchs planning an assassination attempt against the King. He took immediate action, getting a message to Queen Esther who was, in turn, able to inform the King in the nick of time. Mordecai has humbly refuted all claims that he is a national hero. 'I was simply in the right place at the right time,' he said. 'I managed to get a message to the Queen through my contacts at the palace. Queen Esther did the rest.' No details are being released about how the assassination was to have taken place but the two villains are due to be hanged in the city square at midday tomorrow. We wonder how Mordecai will be rewarded for his part in saving the King.

New Queen Chosen!

Breaking news! A royal proclamation has just been released to say that the King has chosen his Queen! Great celebrations are said to be beginning at the palace as, four years after Vashti's deposition, a new Queen is ready to take the throne beside the all-powerful King Xerxes. The identity of the lucky winner of Persia's Next Queen is being kept under wraps until

tonight's broadcast of the final showdown. However, The Persian Times has managed to find an anonymous source at the palace who has described that final moment. Apparently, the King was in his court room waiting for the usual procession of beautiful girls to be bought before him. (It has been said that he was getting thoroughly bored with the whole affair). When this mystery contestant was bought in it was like 'love at first sight', our source says.

'The King even rose to his feet as he stared at this beautiful girl in front of him. Clearly he noticed something different in her from the others. He immediately called for the crown and placed it on her head. They were both smiling and laughing like a couple of lovebirds!' News will follow soon of a national holiday and royal banquet to celebrate the crowning of the new Queen of Persia. Long live the King and Queen!

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WHO, ME?

You will Need

Bibles
 Pen / paper
 Large bag of chocolate M&Ms
 Several age-appropriate magazines
 (Scissors and glue if you are going to make the collage)
 Cards for writing out the Bible verses
 Laptop or some other way of showing YouTube video clip

WELCOME

Icebreaker Activity: Buy a large bag of chocolate M&Ms (avoid nuts) and give each person the same amount (try ten M&Ms). Start by stating something you've never done that you think everyone else has done. For example, you might say, 'I've never had a birthday party,' or some other true statement about yourself that you think everyone else has surely done. Then, everyone who has had a birthday party pays you an M&M. You pay everyone who has not had a party. Keep going until everyone has a turn or until someone runs out of M&Ms. Obviously the idea is to end up with the most M&Ms and be the most deprived!

Feedback from last week: Ask who has memorised Jeremiah 29:11 and have a few people recite it to the group.

WORD

Read the above articles from *The Persian Times*.

In this section we are going to look at two questions:

What does it mean to be beautiful on the inside, and are we really chosen by God?

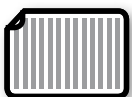
1. Beautiful on the inside

For this activity you will need a selection of magazines that are appropriate for the age of your group. Have the group flick through them and look at photographs of people featured. (For younger groups / if you have time you could ask the group to cut out pieces and create a large collage.)

Ask the questions:

- Do you consider these people to be beautiful?
- If so, what is about them that makes them beautiful?
- Do you see anyone that would be considered ugly in the magazine?
- How about anyone with spots? Bad hairstyle? Brown teeth? Weedy muscles? In a wheelchair?
- How does looking at these photos make you feel about your own appearance?
- From looking at their appearance, what kind of people do you think they are?
- Successful or unsuccessful? Single or in a relationship?

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- No friends or many friends? Have a job, be unemployed?
- What underlying values are being portrayed?

Now watch this YouTube clip 'Beauty Is Only Skin Deep' by Dove <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Kh7jsxi79pc> to emphasise the following points (there are loads of other similar clips on YouTube which you could use for older groups instead of the magazines if you wish):

Most of these images have been computer enhanced in a whole variety of ways so they are not a true reflection of the individual. Seeing images of beautiful people all around us every day in the media can make us doubt our own self-worth. We can feel that we must look like these people, and then we will be liked and successful. However, there are far more normal, plain people in the world than there are 'beautiful people'.

Read Esther 2:8-18 and discuss the following questions.

Esther was undoubtedly a beautiful girl; otherwise she wouldn't have been picked to go into the King's harem. The Bible mentions three times that Esther won approval in someone's eyes (w9,15,17).

- From the above passage, and from your own knowledge of the story, what characteristics do you think Esther portrayed that made her beautiful on the inside and find favour with so many people?
- What do you think is meant by the phrase 'Beauty is only skin deep' and do you agree with it?
- What qualities in other people's characters do you most admire?
- Which of these qualities do you share?

When the prophet Samuel was commissioned by God to choose a new king for Israel, God reminded him not to look at the outward appearance of any potential candidate; what goes on inside a man's heart is much more important to God. 'Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart' (1 Samuel 16:7).

Whether or not we are beautiful on the outside does not concern God; he looks at our hearts and minds – our character. Whilst most people spend hours every week maintaining their outward appearance, we should do all we can to make our inner character pleasing to God and inspirational to other people. In this way we are more likely to find lasting favour (ie be liked by people) than by worrying about what we look like!

Drew Barrymore, a famous actress, believes that the secret to being beautiful lies not in looking good, but in being happy.

'If somebody walks into a room and they're drop-dead gorgeous and sexy, it's really fun to look at. But if somebody is giving of their spirit and they make you laugh and feel good, that's a whole other level of beauty.'

2. Chosen by God

Read the following together:

Recently Sky TV broadcast a seven-part programme called Football's Next Star. Hosted by ex Liverpool and England footballer Jamie Redknapp, this programme showed how hundreds of 16-18-year-old boys tried out to win the opportunity of a lifetime – one season's contract with reigning Italian champions Inter

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Milan. The final ten boys were taken to Milan, to work with some of Inter's biggest stars including Javier Zanetti, Samuel Eto'o and Marco Materazzi. During each programme Marco gathered the boys together to reveal the names of those who had been chosen to continue in the competition, and those who hadn't. Disappointment and rejection were etched on the faces of those dismissed, whilst the chosen few celebrated and took a step further towards their dreams.

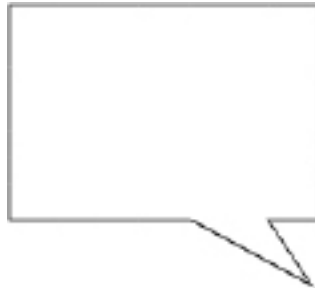
How do you think each of the following people felt?

Younger groups could fill in the speech / thought bubbles.

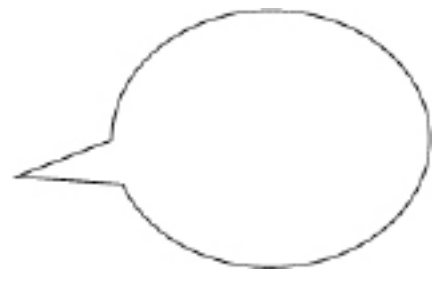
The chosen footballer



The rejected footballer



The coach



Discuss the following questions.

- What other TV shows do you watch where people's hopes and dreams rely on being 'chosen' by another person?
- What good or bad experiences have you had of being chosen / not chosen? How did it make you feel?
- Esther was chosen to be queen, not just by the King but by God. He picked out Esther to fulfil this special purpose he had for her. (More on this in Week 4). Can you think of other Bible characters that were chosen by God for a special task?

Each of the following Bible passages tells of how each of us has individually been chosen by God. Ask each person in the group to find one of these verses in the Bible and write it out on a card. Place all the cards in the middle of the group. Read each one aloud and ask the group to decide which is their individual favourite and why. Encourage them to write this verse in their study books.

Jeremiah 1:5 – 'Before I made you in your mother's womb, I chose you' (*New Century Version*).

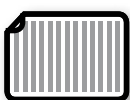
1 Peter 2:9 – 'But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light' (*NIV*).

John 15:16 – 'You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit – fruit that will last' (*NIV*).

Deuteronomy 7:6 – 'The Lord your God has chosen you out of all the peoples on the face of the earth to be his people, his treasured possession' (*NIV*).

Psalms 139: 13-16 – 'For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well. My frame was not hidden from you when I was made in the secret place. When I was woven together in the depths of the earth, your eyes saw my unformed body. All the days ordained for me were written in

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your book before one of them came to be' (NIV).

Ephesians 1:4-5 – 'For he chose us in him before the creation of the world to be holy and blameless in his sight. In love he predestined us to be adopted as his sons through Jesus Christ, in accordance with his pleasure and will' (NIV).

Isaiah 41:9 – 'I took you from the ends of the earth, from its farthest corners I called you. I said, "You are my servant"; I have chosen you and have not rejected you' (NIV).

1 Thessalonians 1:4 – 'For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you' (NIV).

What we have learned from these verses is that God knew each of us even before we were born. He chose us to be his son or daughter. He loves us individually; we are so special and precious to him. Words like special, beautiful and chosen can be hard to believe about ourselves, but it is the truth about who we are as Christians and so should form the basis of our identity.

PRAYER

Ask the group to complete the blanks in the following prayer (or write their own).

Lord Jesus

Thank you for all I have learned about Esther's character and beauty. I realise that you are much more interested in my heart than in my outward appearance. Some things I need to change in my life to become more beautiful on the inside are _____

I ask you to work in my heart to make me more beautiful and to help me to share your beauty with those around me.

Thank you that you have chosen me and that I am special to you. This makes me feel _____

I might not become the next king or queen but I know that you love me for who I am!

Use these written prayers to pray together as a group. Encourage each individual to read their prayer out loud to God... and all agree with a loud 'AMEN!'

For older groups

Ask each group member to write out their own prayer to God based on the discussions / thoughts of this Bible study or using the above Bible verses. They can then use these in a time of prayer together. Alternatively, if you have a particularly confident group you could simply have an open time of prayer for people to express their thoughts and thanks to God however they wish.

APPLICATION

Make a list of three or four things that you can do over the next week to share your inner beauty with someone else!

Then do it!

Report back next time!

