

celloutlines | week one

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 ONE

The Persian Times

King's Banquet reaches Six Months

The royal banquet at the palace shows no sign of ceasing even though it has just hit the 180-day milestone – that's six months of partying! Many hundreds of the country's greatest officials have been treated to an unprecedented display of the wealth and power of King Xerxes. It has been said that hundreds of slaves carrying the King's jewellery, weapons and gold have been triumphantly paraded in front of the guests as the King seeks to assure them of his strength, authority and wisdom – the greatest ruler of all time. Wine has been available in unimaginable quantities with each guest able to consume without limit. It had been rumoured that the palace gates will shortly be flung open so the general public can take part in the festivities and sample the King's extraordinary generosity. Can't wait!

Vashti Ousted from Palace

It's official... the Queen has left the building! In an unprecedented move Queen Vashti has refused a direct order from King Xerxes to appear before his distinguished guests at the Royal Banquet. It has been said that Vashti was ordered to present herself wearing her splendid royal crown (some people think the King meant only the crown and nothing else!) and display her beauty. An anonymous palace insider who was with the Queen at the time said it was the final straw in the relationship. 'I will not be degraded in this manner, being set up to be mauled by a group of drunken men,' Vashti reportedly screamed at the King's messengers. 'I am not a possession that the King owns – I am supposed to be his WIFE!' Within the hour Vashti was out on her ear. No one knows where she has gone, but one thing is for sure – the King will be looking for a new queen in the very near future.

Thousands Apply for New TV reality show 'Persia's Next Queen'

Auditions opened recently for a brand new reality TV show Persia's Next Queen. Thousands of young girls have turned up at venues all round the empire in the hope of being considered beautiful enough to attend the first round of the competition. Each girl selected will be taken to the palace and indulged in a full twelve months of every conceivable beauty treatment, before she will be presented to the King in the hope that he will choose her to be his queen.

Concerns have been mounting at the number of young girls that have been forcibly removed from their families and taken to the palace to participate in this competition against their will. Questions too have been raised about what will happen to the vast numbers of girls rejected after their one night with the King. It would appear that they will be destined to a life in the royal harem with little or no chance of meeting the King again, let alone falling in love, getting married and having children of their own.

TV bosses are looking seriously at these claims.

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WHO'S IN CONTROL?

You Will Need

Bibles

Blindfolds – enough for half of the group

Pens / large sheet of paper

Pieces of card shaped like large bookmark for everyone

Coloured pens and other items with which to design a bookmark

Laptop or some other way of showing YouTube video clip

WELCOME

Try one or all of the following activities to break the ice... or use your own tried and tested methods!

The Name Game (also known as the Adjective Game)

Start with one person in the room picking a word that describes himself or herself as a person. The catch is, that the word must start with the first letter of their first name. For example, the first person (probably you the group leader) says: 'Hello! My name is Vivacious Vivian.' The person after you must say your adjective and name before saying theirs. So they would go: 'Hello, Vivacious Vivian, my name is Silly Sam.' Then the third person would go, 'Hello, Vivacious Vivian and Silly Sam, my name is Easy-going Edwin.' This continues until all of the group have gone. Being last is hilarious in this game, because they must remember everyone's name AND adjective before stating theirs.

Blanket Name Game

Blanket Name Game is a simple name recognition/identification game. Go around the room and make introductions as above. Separate into two groups sitting on the floor and have two people hold a large, thick blanket separating the two groups so that neither group can see the other. One person from each group sits slightly in front of their group close to the blanket. When the blanket drops, the first person to correctly call out the name of the other group's designated person wins the round. The group may strike different humorous poses to distract the attention of other group!

Three words

This game would work best for older groups. Give your group a minute or two to choose three words they would use to describe themselves. Go around the room, ask participants to introduce themselves and share the three words that best describe them: eg 'Hi, my name is Deb. I would describe myself as curious, kind, and annoying.' Allow questions for fun.

WORD

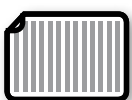
Read the above articles from *The Persian Times*.

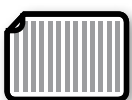
1. The Book Of Esther

Introduce the book of Esther to the group.

Check that each person knows where to find Esther in the Bible and establish who was there for the

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week when there was the focus on the Esther factfile. Generate some discussion to help to remind you and your group of the story of Esther and find out what each person thought about the story. Did they understand it? Have they read through the book of Esther in the Bible? What were their favourite parts / characters of the story? etc. (See the questions in the young persons' copy.)

Ask the group what is unusual about the book of Esther?

Get some discussion going around the fact that the book does not mention God once. Why, then, is it included in the Bible? Are there things that we can learn from the book about God anyway?

2. God, The Unseen Director

Read the following together.

When the curtain rises and the play begins, we see and hear the actors and actresses tell a story. But the most important person in the play is not on stage. The director is the one who has instructed the cast for months on where to stand and sit, how to say a line. The director is behind the scenes giving final instructions, touching up make-up and giving encouragement. The play is a success because of the director, who has orchestrated every detail of the play.

When we read the book of Esther, we never read God's name, but he is the key figure in the story. But many of the things that happen in the book could not be 'just luck'. Take, for instance, the time that King Xerxes could not sleep and his servant 'just happened' to read the records of the time that Mordecai saved the King's life (Esther 6:1-3). In fact, the entire book of Esther shows that God's guiding hand was behind the scenes to save the Jewish nation.

Where can you see God at work in the story?

Look through Esther together and try to find as many 'God-incidences' as possible. For example:

- How come Vashti is deposed just at the point when Esther is of eligible age and status to be considered for the harem?
- How come Esther is chosen from all the women whom the King inspects?
- How come Mordecai is the one who overhears the death plot and saves the King's life?
- How come the King cannot sleep on the very occasion Haman comes to seek Mordecai's death?
- How come Haman happens to be in the court at the precise moment the King wants to honour Mordecai?
- How come the edict to annihilate the Jews ends up being reversed?
- How come the King's favourite ends up hanged on the gallows he had made for his enemy?

The Book of Esther reminds us that God, though hidden, is always at work.

Esther and Mordecai had no idea that they were at the beginning of an amazing journey – through their faith and trust in God they would literally save a nation.

3. Trusting God In My Own Life**Blindfolded Trust Walk**

The group divides in half. One half is blindfolded. The other half chooses a partner who is blindfolded,

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but may not talk to them at any time. They take their blindfolded person on a trust walk by allowing them to hold their arm. Only the blindfolded person may talk – the guide must stay silent. At the end of the walk, the guide returns to their group. The blindfolded person then removes the blindfold and the roles are reversed. The guides then choose a blindfolded partner. Before taking off blindfolds, they separate. At the end of the game each person tries to identify their guide and say how they knew!

NB Please assess the area in which this activity will take place and ensure there are no obvious trip hazards or other ways the participants may injure themselves.

Summarise the game with the following thoughts:

To make this game work you had to trust someone, although you couldn't see them or hear them. But you must have somehow been aware that they were guiding you around the room. What happened if you accidentally let go of your guide's arm? There are times in our lives when we must trust God even when we can't see him or hear him. We must trust that he is working behind the scenes, like in the story of Esther, guiding us along his path, to outwork his plans for our lives.

For older groups:

If you have an older group who would not want to participate in the blindfold trust walk you could use either of the two YouTube clips below to introduce this section about trusting in God.

Teaching illustration on trusting God (Man vs Wild)

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ptDVHdDXxHY>

Twelve Spies – Trusting God

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YulcL4Y3Q8I&feature=PlayList&p=5049F63B408E8AA5&index=1>

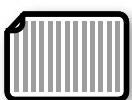
Read Esther 2: 2–11

Discuss what it must have been like for Esther taken from her family. One minute she was happy and secure, thought she knew where her life was going... and the next, everything had changed. Surely she did not understand what was happening to her and must have wondered what God was doing. Use the following questions to facilitate some group discussion about trusting and believing in God even when things may be going wrong or we don't understand what is happening.

Group discussion

- What sort of questions would Esther have been asking God?
- (Where are you, God? Do you see what is happening to me? Can you hear me, God? Why are you not answering me, God?)
- What sort of things happen in our lives that make us question God in this way?
- Ask the group to share with each other similar situations that have happened in their own life and how it made them feel.
- What would you say to anyone who claims that because God does not appear to be working in a certain situation nor exerting his control, he must have abandoned them?
- What can we learn from the story of Esther about trusting God in our lives even when we don't understand?

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It is often easy to think that if a situation isn't working out as we think it should, then God has abandoned us. But we only see part of the picture and God sees the whole. He is often working in ways that we can't see or don't expect. God wants us to learn to trust him in faith. It is often only as we look back that we'll see how he was working on our behalf. Esther reminds us not to put God in a box, but to be aware of his presence in all of life's circumstances.

PRAYER

We have used the phrase the 'sovereignty' of God. The Bible dictionary puts it like this:

The absolute right of God to do all things according to his own good pleasure.

(Daniel 4: 25,35; Romans 9: 15-23; 1 Timothy 6: 15; Revelation 4: 11).

Write the letters SOVEREIGNTY vertically on a large piece of paper in the middle of the group. Use the letters to think about how God is able to take control and guide us in our lives and how we want to submit to his will, even when we don't understand what is going on.

For example:

- S**ees everything that is happening
- O**ver all things
- V**ery loving
- E**nemies cannot stand against you
- R**adiate love for us
- E**normous
- I**n charge
- G**od's grand design
- N**ations are in your hands
- T**rustworthy
- Y**ou are amazing

Use your thoughts in a time of prayer that is appropriate to the age of your group.

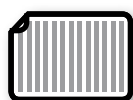
For younger groups, or those that may find it hard to pray out loud, each person could take one line and as you pray round the group say a one-sentence prayer, eg 'Thank you, God, that you see everything that is happening in my life', 'Thank you, God, that you are over all things', 'Thank you for your grand design for my life'.

APPLICATION

God knows the future and his plans for us are good and full of hope.

Read Jeremiah 29:11. (Use different versions of the Bible if the young people have them). Ask each person to choose one version of this verse and to try to memorise it for next time. Give out some blank pieces of card shaped like a large bookmark and ask them to design a bookmark or card using this verse. (This can be used to mark the book of Esther!) They can be as creative as they want to. Ask them, as they are drawing, to think of situations in their own or others' lives where they need to really

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understand the truth of these words. Offer to pray with them individually at the end if anyone wants to.

'For I know the plans I have for you,' declares the LORD, 'plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future' (*NIV*).

'I know what I'm doing. I have it all planned out – plans to take care of you, not abandon you, plans to give you the future you hope for' (*The Message*).

For older groups

As an alternative activity for older groups give out some pieces of card and ask each person to write out Jeremiah 29:11 (*NIV*). Then ask them to write their own paraphrase of the verse, putting in specific situations or people as they feel appropriate. (Paraphrasing can be really useful to help get behind the meaning of the words. In paraphrasing, you use your own words to express the meaning of the passage. Be careful not to change the meaning, just communicate it in a different manner, perhaps using words that are more familiar to you. *The Message* translation or *The Living Bible* are good examples of a paraphrase.)

Ask each person to share their paraphrase with the group. Don't forget to ask them to memorise the verse for next time!

