

WISE COUNSEL FOR TROUBLED TIMES

STUDY SEVEN

Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

There is nothing like a huge dose of theology to put steel in our bones. That is why I often encourage you to “Learn to think biblically.” Regardless of what is happening to you, revert to what you have learned from the Scriptures about God and about His power and His purpose and His plan. You will be given strength at the time you need it if you will rely on the truth you have learned and believe in God.

—Charles R. Swindoll

IN view of the billions of people that populate our planet, how easy to feel like a statistical speck of human dust. How easy to downplay the importance of our actions, the importance of our words. How easy to rationalize passivity!

Yet, the Bible calls us to war against those *life-zapping* thoughts. We engage such battles by submitting our mind and will to the *life-giving*, inspired Word of God. No one walks the earth as a divine afterthought penciled into history. God made everyone unique and has gifted us all to accomplish a specific purpose.

Sometimes that giftedness includes standing alone, like Esther. In the fourth chapter of the book of Esther, Scripture reveals why God made her, how He sustained her through difficulties, and how He used her to rescue the lives of many.

Chuck Swindoll traces the work of God in this season of Esther’s life to teach how one person, when empowered by the Spirit of God, might make a difference in the world.



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Committed to Excellence in Communicating Biblical Truth and Its Application

Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17



PREPARE YOUR HEART

To the churches in Galatia, Paul wrote:

My old self has been crucified with Christ. It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.
(Galatians 2:20)

Consider that truth in your life—how Christ loves *you* and gave Himself for *you*. It's that truth that impels us to study God's Word and obey it. Record a prayer below thanking God for His love for you through His Son, Jesus. Invite the One who lives in you to empower you to make a difference in your world.



TURN TO THE SCRIPTURES

The author of Esther recorded a time in Jewish history after God led His people out of exile back to the promised land in 536 BC under the leadership of Zerubbabel (Ezra 2:1). The author answers, “What happened to those who didn't return to Israel?” The events revolve around the Jews living in the provinces of Persia from 483 BC to 473 BC. The account of Esther occurs about thirty to forty years before Nehemiah returned to rebuild the walls in 444 BC.

If you own a Bible dictionary, now is the time to pull it from the shelf. If you don't, we recommend buying the *New Unger's Bible Dictionary*. For an online alternative, consult, “*Encyclopedia of the Bible*.” Let's research the following people and places that are mentioned in the book of Esther and record a few notes on them.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

Xerxes or Ahasuerus (Esther 1:1)

Susa (1:2)

Persia (1:3)

With a clearer understanding of the historical and geographical background of Esther, let's review the key events in Esther's life.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

Esther 4 builds to the climax of the story which occurs in Esther 5. Here's what happened leading up to Esther 4:

- 1) *Esther 1*: Persian king, Xerxes (also known as Ahasuerus), deposed his wife Queen Vashti in 483 BC, which was about the time Xerxes engaged in the second Persian invasion of Greece. The first Greco-Persian war was fought by Xerxes' father, Darius the Great.
- 2) *Esther 2*: After Xerxes returned defeated, God orchestrated the circumstances that led the young Jewish woman, Esther, to become queen of Persia.
- 3) *Esther 3*: Xerxes' primary official, Haman, convinced the king to assert his authority and decree a mass slaughter of the Jewish people.

We enter the story with great suspense and terror in the air. *How will God deliver His people?*



Observation: Mordecai's Dilemma

In observation, we focus on what the text says so we don't make it say something it doesn't.¹

Mourning and Weeping

Read *Esther 4:1–4*.

How and where did Mordecai express his sorrow after learning of the king's command regarding the Jews?



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

Sometimes, biblical authors use repetition for emphasis to reveal their intent. How did the author use repetition for emphasis in *Esther 4:1–4*?

What news did Esther's eunuchs and maids share with her? How did she respond?

Informing and Responding

Observe *Esther 4:5–12*. This paragraph chronicles the first of the exchanges between Esther and Mordecai.

In *Esther 4:5–9*, what steps did Mordecai take to convey all the information which Esther didn't know? In what verse, and in what way, does it seem that Mordecai had insider knowledge to the innerworkings of Haman's plot?



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

What two reasons did Esther use to evade Mordecai's command (Esther 4:11)?

Esther is left with a dilemma. It's difficult to appreciate life as it existed at that time. You didn't simply walk into the king's presence, even though you were the queen. If the king hadn't invited you and you barged in, it could mean your death. She knows the rules.

—Chuck Swindoll

Pleading and Praying

Observe *Esther 4:13–17*, the last of Esther's and Mordecai's exchanges in this chapter.

In what four ways did Mordecai appeal to Esther to petition the king?

Esther faced two choices—both of which would likely result in a speedy death. What did Esther require of Mordecai before she did what he asked?



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

She's turning over in her mind what this will require, just as everyone does who stands alone in a situation that includes great risk. She weighs all of this in her head. She ponders Mordecai's message and she realizes that what he says makes all the sense in the world, so she steps up. This is where she shows her true colors. She weighed his words. She realized her calling. Now notice she's not doing it in her own strength. She said, "I need you to pray for me. I need you to be there for me. I need you to fast. I need you to represent me before the throne of God." —Chuck Swindoll



Interpretation: The Courageous Decision of One Woman

During interpretation, we answer the question, "What does the text mean?" We seek to understand the text in its historical context so we can grasp its timeless theology.

How did Mordecai demonstrate faith in Esther 4:13–14? What does Mordecai's statement teach us about the character of God?

Esther demonstrated a change in attitude between verses 11 and 16. What was that change? How would her faith in God have produced that change to lead her to stand alone?

Mordecai helped Esther think more clearly about God and His work in our world. As she pondered the truth, belief overcame her fear. She strengthened herself in God to walk where her feet did not want to walk.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17



Correlation: Defining Faith

During correlation, we ask, “How does the biblical passage compare with other passages?”

Carefully read the passage below:

Faith shows the reality of what we hope for; it is the evidence of things we cannot see. Through their faith, the people in days of old earned a good reputation. By faith we understand that the entire universe was formed at God’s command, that what we now see did not come from anything that can be seen. . . . And it is impossible to please God without faith. Anyone who wants to come to him must believe that God exists and that he rewards those who sincerely seek him. (Hebrews 11:1–3, 6)

How did Esther demonstrate the truth of the passage above as she prepared to stand alone?

*Even though God may not appear before you in visible form, He is sovereignly at work, which makes the book of Esther all the more interesting because the name of God does not once appear in the book. The only book in all the Bible where that’s true. However, you can see His footprint; you can see His thumbprint. You can see His hand in the life of one who was called to stand alone when there was no one else who could do what she could do.
—Chuck Swindoll*



Application: Responding in Faith

During application, we answer the question, “How should we respond to the text?” We should not skip it. Chuck quotes Howard Hendricks: “If you observe and interpret and correlate the Scriptures but fail to apply the Scriptures, you have committed an abortion.”² Challenging words. Let’s look at Chuck’s two application points from Esther 4.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17

The Difference of One

Not until we believe one person can make a difference will we be willing to risk.

As we read in Hebrews 11, God's power can pour through one person for the benefit of many. As the first step to live this truth, write a prayer acknowledging to God His power and stating your willingness to be used for His purposes even if it means taking actions that risk your comfort or convenience.

From Theory to Action

Only when we move from the safe harbor of theory to the world of reality do we make a difference.

Often our consistent, small actions—though seemingly insignificant—make the most difference. Are you silent when you know you should speak? Passive when you know God has called you to action? Take a moment to write down where you need to step out of the safe harbor of theory.

In chapter five, Esther did go before the king, made her case, and received his favor. She risked her life and saved the countless Jews who had not returned to Israel. Even in chaos and conflict, God works His sovereign plan for our eternal good.



Standing Alone

Esther 4:1–17



A FINAL PRAYER

Father, thank You for performing wonders in my life. Thank You for moving in the hearts of others to lead me to Your glorious Son, Jesus. I confide in His power, believe in His Word, and want to walk in His way even if it means standing alone. In His precious name, amen.

ENDNOTES

1. We recommend you purchase Chuck's *book Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* if you do not already have a copy. You can also read Chuck's *Searching the Scriptures* introductions on sts.insight.org.
2. Charles R. Swindoll, *Searching the Scriptures: Find the Nourishment Your Soul Needs* (Carol Stream, IL: Tyndale House, 2017), 160.



Standing Alone

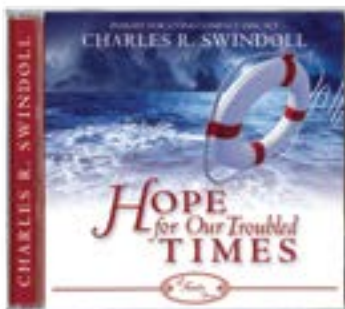
Esther 4:1–17



Tools for Digging Deeper



Wise Counsel for Troubled Times
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD series



Hope for Our Troubled Times
by Charles R. Swindoll
CD set



Finding GOD When the
World's on FIRE
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For the 2020 broadcasts, this *Searching the Scriptures* study was developed by Aaron Massey in collaboration with Bryce Klabunde, executive vice president of Pastoral Ministries, based upon the original outlines, charts, and transcripts of Charles R. Swindoll's messages.

