



# Esther Saves Her People

**Goal: To discover ways to turn our faith into action.**

## RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

### . . . In Esther 4-7

Esther, Queen of Persia, is an important figure in Jewish history. She was a Jewish girl, chosen to be the wife of the Persian King Ahasuerus (Xerxes I, 486–465 BCE). As queen, Esther foiled a plot to kill the Jewish people. She was able to turn it around against the enemies of the Jews.

Haman, a major official, was offended by Mordecai, Esther's Jewish cousin and her guardian. Haman's resentment against Mordecai and the Jews led him to persuade the king to issue a decree to exterminate all Jews on the thirteenth day of the month. But Esther intervened. Mordecai told her, "Maybe it was for a moment like this that you came to be part of the royal family" (4:14, CEB). Esther was willing to die with her people (v. 16).

But the tables were turned. Haman was given the death sentence, and the Jews were permitted to defend themselves against their enemies and win victories. This began the Feast of Purim, celebrated by Jewish people to this day.

God's grace was with Esther; even as it was "for a moment like this" that she was able to save her people. Her people remembered her brave actions, with gratitude.

### . . . In Your Children's Experiences

The story of Esther and her willingness to speak up for her people is still remembered and celebrated in the holiday of Purim. This story, with its many characters and evolving plot, is a great one for children to connect with as they hear it and follow the actions. Just as Jewish children choose one of the characters at Purim, so the children you are teaching can imagine the thoughts of Haman, Mordecai, Esther, and King Ahasuerus to better understand the choices they made. Power, bravery, meanness, wisdom, cruelty—emotions that lead to good and bad choices are all here for children to witness and understand in this story and in their lives.

### . . . In Your Relationships with the Children

As you prepare to tell the story of Esther, be aware of the uniqueness of this small book in the Bible. Children may be interested to know how remarkable it is to have a story about a woman, and a book of the Bible where God is not mentioned! They might enjoy seeing how God is present in this story through the actions of the characters. Where do they see God's love at work? Where is God's concern for justice, mercy, and kindness evident in the actions of the characters? Where is it missing?

*O God, guide me into new ways to deepen my faith  
and to serve you. In Jesus' name. Amen.*



## Supplies

**Music & Melodies**  
(MM) 2023–2024

**Stories, Colors & More**  
(SCM) i–iv, 12, 20, 21

basic supplies  
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

beads, pea gravel,  
paper clips, small  
erasers, broken crayons,  
and other small items

empty small plastic  
bottles

duct tape

## Responding

### Celebrating

card-stock copies of  
**Grace Notes (GN) 1,**  
**GN 2;** prepared  
cardboard box; white  
tissue paper; brass  
fasteners; flashlight

### Offering

roll of refrigerated sugar  
cookie dough, jam

### Extra

copies of **GN 3**

## GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Celebrating God’s Grace” and “Offering God’s Grace” require more prep.

### Welcoming and Preparing

**LG** **A** **B** **SD**

Play “Alabad al Señor (Let Us Give Praise to God)”—**MM 21**—as the children arrive.

Welcome each child by saying, “Grace and peace be with you, (*Name*).” Prompt the children to respond, “And also with you.”

Invite children to place a green cloth, a candle, and a Bible on the worship table.

Ask some children to prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two lead today’s singing.

Help the children make noisemakers for today’s story using empty toilet paper tubes and small plastic bottles. Use the following directions to make the noisemakers. Give each child a toilet paper tube and an empty small plastic bottle.

- ▼ Choose what noisemakers to put in the bottle, one item or a mixture of items. Place items in bottle and screw on the cap.
- ▼ Place the bottle upside down into the toilet paper tube. Secure the bottle to the tube with duct tape. Assist as needed.
- ▼ Decorate the tube.

### Singing

**B** **MS**

Give God an offering of music. Play and sing “Alabad al Señor (Let Us Give Praise to God)”—**MM 21; SCM 20**. Invite the children to raise their arms in the air and shake their noisemakers while singing.

### Praying

**T**

Turn on the candle as a reminder of God’s light in the world through Jesus. Pray:

Holy God, we praise you for all that you have done and continue to do in the world. We know you are always with us, but sometimes it is hard to remember. Help us to place our trust in you. In Jesus’ name, we pray. Amen.



### Preparing to Hear the Story

L B MS

Say that today's Bible story took place a long time ago. It is about a woman named Esther. God placed Esther in the right place at the right time. She saved God's people. Every year Jewish people remember Esther's story and her bravery at a celebration called Purim (POOR-im), a celebration to mark this event.

Explain that everyone will participate during the second reading of the story. They will say a phrase or do an action when they hear a person's name. Ask the children to practice saying and doing the following:

- ▼ Esther—Say, "Oh, beautiful queen." (*raise arms in the air*)
- ▼ The king—Say, "Hail to the king!" (*make an exaggerated bow*)
- ▼ Mordecai—Say, "Faithful and wise uncle." (*place hands, palms together, and nod head*)
- ▼ Haman—Shake the noisemakers.



Today's story can be found in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), [www.pcusastore.com](http://www.pcusastore.com).

### Hearing the Story

B L MS SD

Have a child to turn to Esther 4 in the Bible so that the children know the story comes from the Bible. Read **SCM 12** or listen to the story audio. Place the open Bible on the worship table. Conclude by saying, "Word of wisdom, Word of grace," and prompt children to say, "Thanks be to God."

Read the story again, asking the children to participate during the story as they practiced earlier.

After you finish telling the story, set aside the noisemakers.

### Reflecting on God's Grace

C

Use the following questions to reflect on the story together:

- ▼ Why do you think Esther asked for the Jewish people to pray before she began her task?
- ▼ How was Esther brave?
- ▼ Are there times you felt you needed to be brave? What was that like?
- ▼ What does this story tell us about God?

**B** *Children can be distracted by objects—ordinary items and items that are not usually present. Giving children the choice of putting items away first helps gain buy-in to better behavior. Removal of distracting items becomes necessary if children fail to willingly put them away.*

### Singing

Celebrate that God encourages our faith to grow into action by singing "We Are Growing"—**MM 28; SCM 21**.

Turn off the candle.



## RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

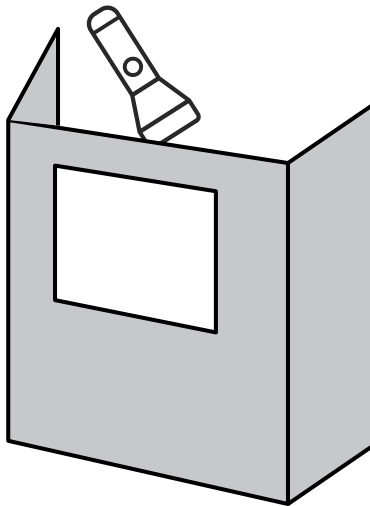
Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.



### Celebrating God's Grace

SD F

*Before the session, cut a 9" x 12" rectangle from the upper half of the front of a large box. Cut the top, back, and bottom off the box so the three sides can sit on a table. Cut out the puppets from card-stock copies of GN 1 and GN 2.*



Invite the children to make a shadow puppet theater. Show them the puppet theater you prepared. Encourage the children to decorate the front of the box. Help a couple of children tape the tissue paper on the back side of the cutout rectangle to make the screen.

Give several children the puppets and have the children tape pencils to the backs of the figures to turn them into puppets. Use a brass fastener to attach Queen Esther's arm so the children can move it to point to Haman.

Ask a volunteer to stand behind the children operating the puppets to shine the flashlight toward the screen.

Ask the children to take turns reenacting the story with the figures. Perform the story for one another or another class or group.

### Praying God's Grace

L

Remind the children that being faithful to God is about telling the truth, even when you think you might get in trouble. Read the following story:

Pablo was ten years old. He was a busy boy, always thinking of fun things to do. He was playing with his little sister Tina and his friend Felicia. Pablo said, "Let's pretend that the floor is lava and we have to climb on the furniture to get around the room." That sounded like fun, but Felicia said that she was concerned that someone could get hurt or the furniture could be damaged. Pablo didn't care. He just wanted to have fun.

Felicia said to Tina, "Your mom is upstairs. You should go tell her what's going on. She may have something else for us to do." Tina didn't want to. Pablo may get mad at her. Felicia encouraged her, saying, "Tina, we don't want Pablo to get hurt or in trouble. You need to say something."

Tina thought about it and then she got brave. She turned to Pablo and said, "Mom is not going to like this game. Someone could get hurt or we could break something."



Pablo laughed and said, "You are such a baby. This will be fun!"

Tina marched up the stairs and said, "Mom, I want to have fun, but I think Pablo is doing something wrong. He wants to climb on the furniture and not touch the floor. Will you help us come up with another game to play?"

Wonder together about times when we know it is important to speak out. Ask the children if they know anyone who spoke out and stopped something bad from happening. Be prepared to share a brief story of your own, showing how you know God will always be with you.

Offer a prayer for the children. Turn to the child on your left and take his or her right hand in your left hand. Say, "(Name), for times when you are brave. . . ." Put your right hand over your left hand and your neighbor's hand and say, "I am with you in prayer." Have the children follow your example with their neighbors.



### Offering God's Grace



*Hamantaschen* ( $\pi$ ) are traditional treats for the celebration of Purim, the annual Jewish festival that celebrates the bravery of Esther. Tell the children that hamantaschen are made to look like Haman's hat, legendarily a three-cornered hat. Help the children make hamantaschen cookies using the following directions:

- ▼ Slice the sugar cookie dough into ¼" thick rounds.
- ▼ Place a small bit of jam in the center of each slice.
- ▼ Fold up three edges and shape into a triangle, leaving an opening to see the jam.
- ▼ Pinch the corners to seal.
- ▼ Bake according to the cookie dough package directions.

Set out the cookies for your church's hospitality time and, if possible, stage an impromptu performance of Esther's story, using **SCM 13** and the noisemakers.

**LG** *Providing opportunities for children to welcome others, offer help, and express generosity helps build their confidence. This also helps them learn that they are gifted members of your community.*



### Extra Activity



Remind the children that Esther was a hero to her people. Invite the children to name some heroes that have helped others. Children at this age may name people such as firefighters, police officers, and medical professionals, or they may name superheroes they have seen in movies or read about in stories. Encourage them to tell you why these people, real or fictional, are heroes. Suggest that some of the superheroes we hear about wear capes. Hand out copies of **GN 3** and invite the children to design a cape that they might wear to help them be brave like a hero. Encourage the children to share their pictures and tell about their designs.



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit [www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads](http://www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads). Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

### LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Ask the children to help clean the space.

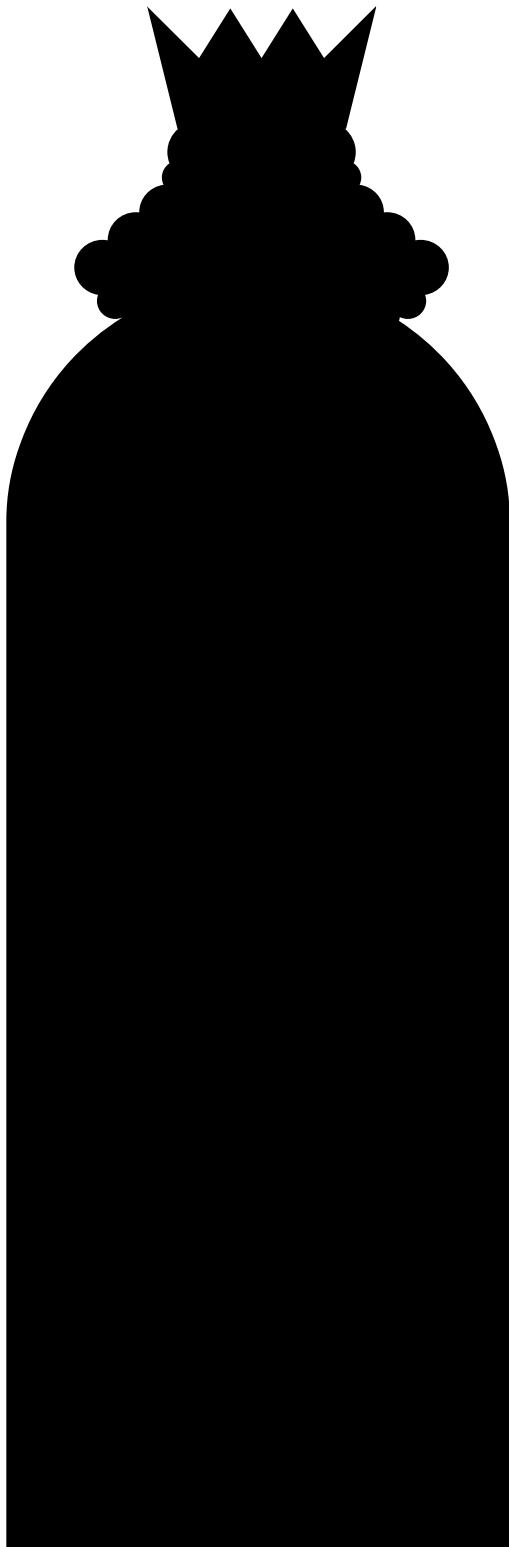
Invite the children to gather in a circle. Sing “Alabad al Señor (Let Us Give Praise to God)”—**MM 21; SCM 20**.

Encourage the children to look for times that they can be brave and stand up for what is right. Recall the heroes named in “Extra Activity.”

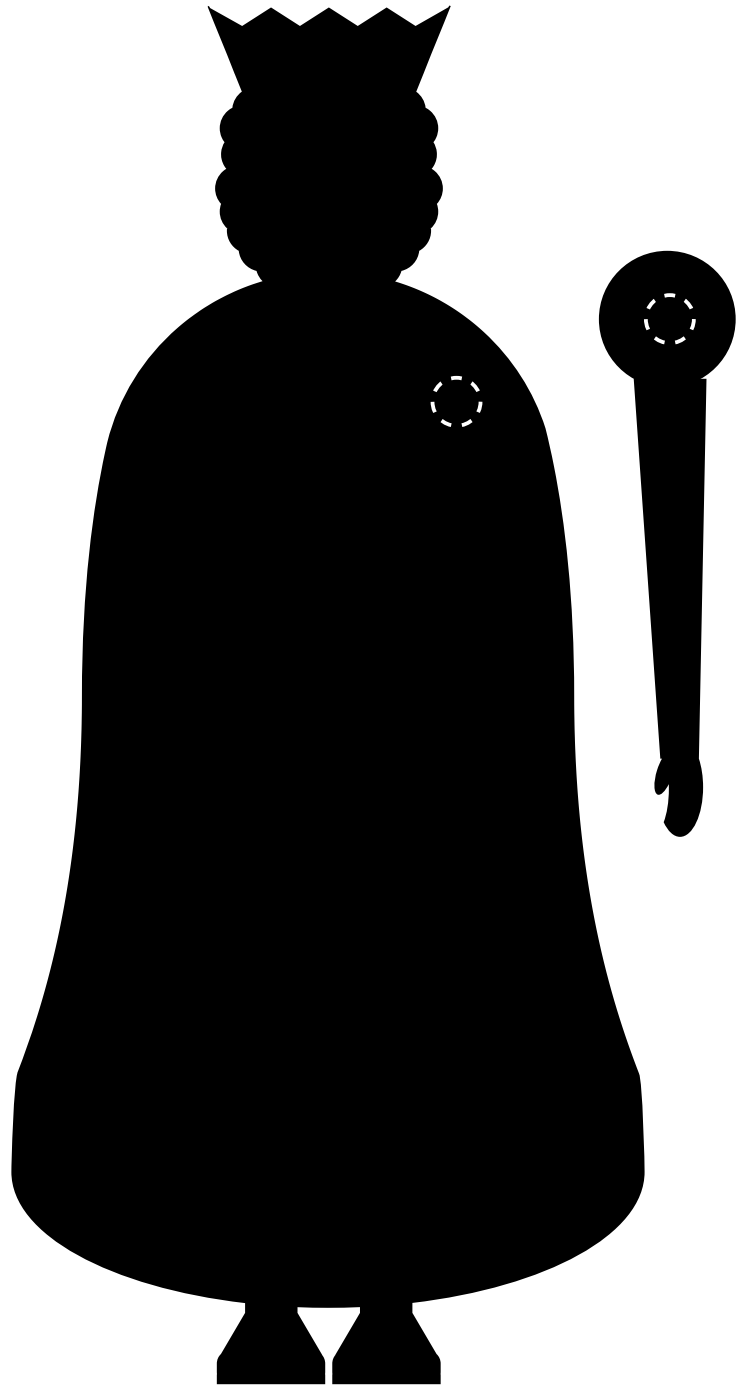
Pray the following prayer with the children:

Dear God, thank you for the heroes in our lives who show us how to be brave, even when we may be scared. Thank you for being with us at all times. Amen.

Say the following blessing to each child, “(Name), go in peace to love and serve the Lord.



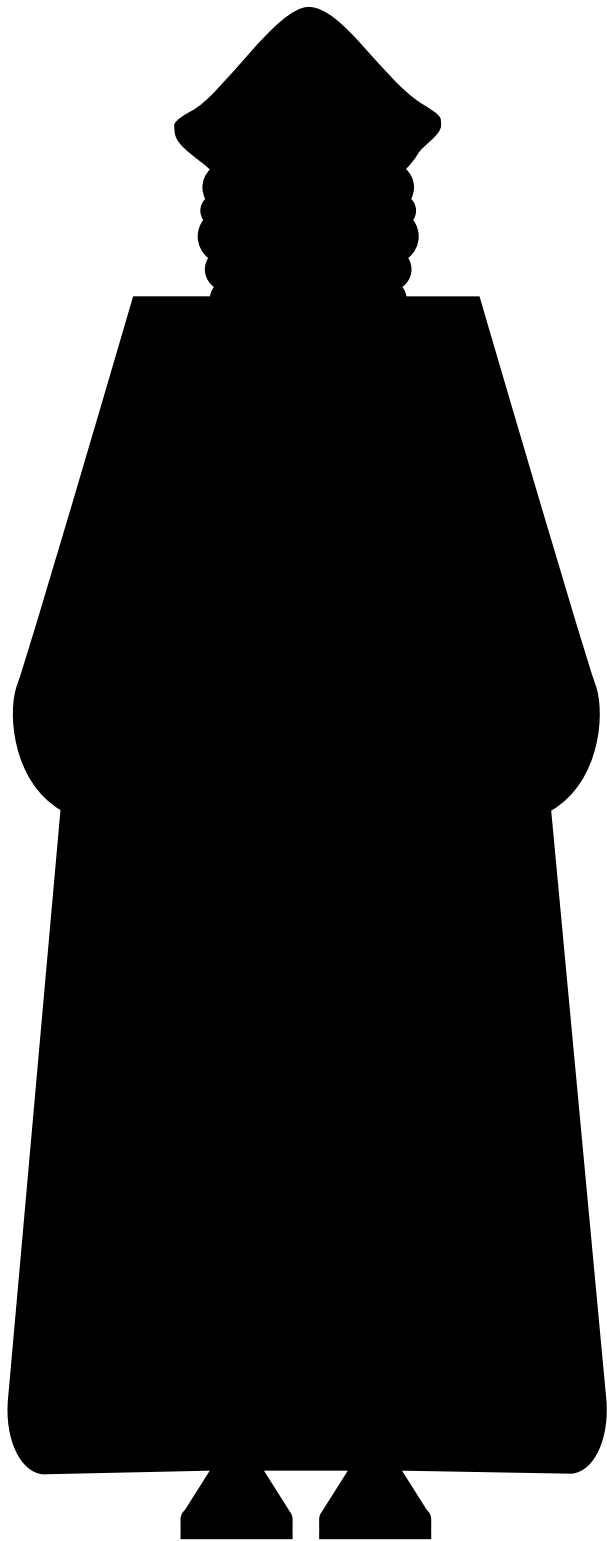
King Ahasuerus



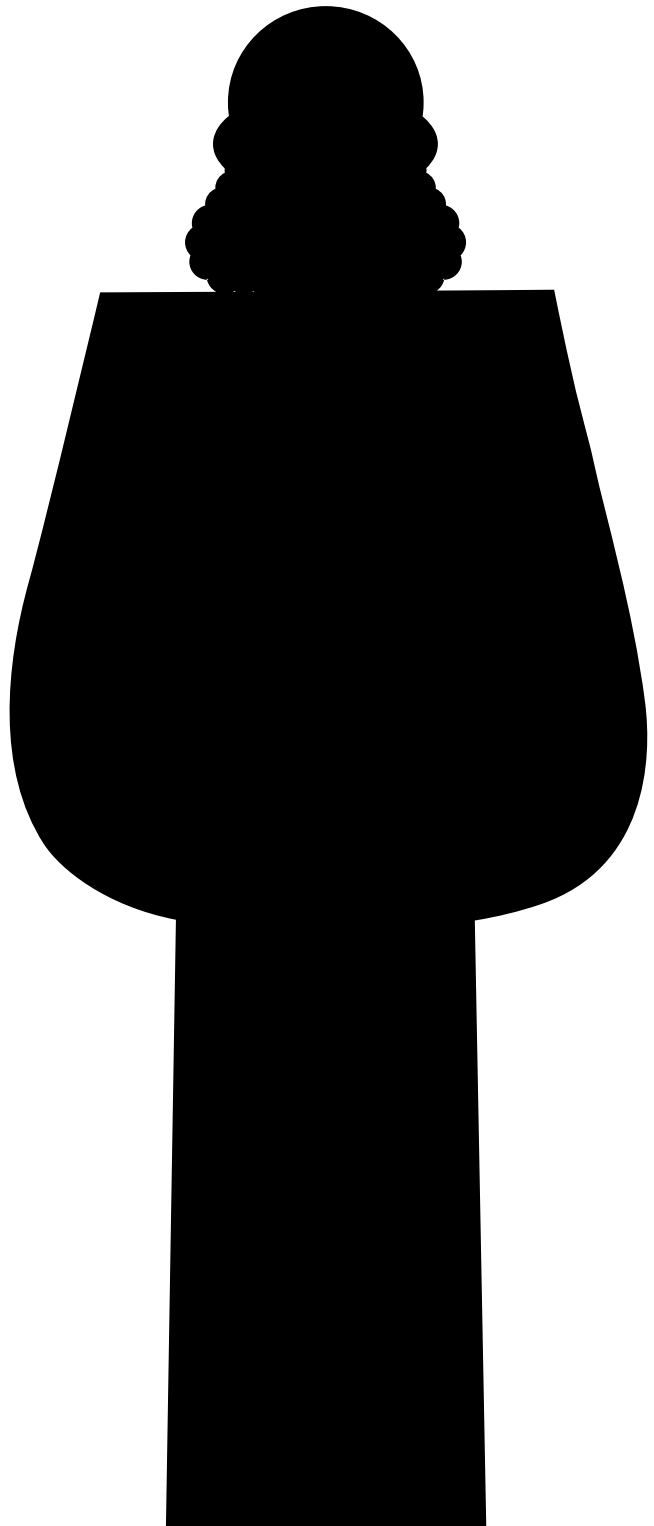
Queen Esther







Haman



Mordecai



