



Week 3

OWNERSHIP
versus
MANAGEMENT

Start

Welcome to group session 3 of Pathways.

Where was your first job? What did you do?

What's the difference between being an owner of a business versus being a manager? In what ways are the responsibilities different?

Before we begin, read aloud Esther 4:9-14 together as a group. The passage is summarized below.

When Esther received Mordecai's message about the danger to the Jewish people, she explained that she couldn't approach the king because Persian law meted out death to anyone who entered his presence uninvited. Mordecai answered by warning her that as a Jewess, her own life was in jeopardy and that God could save His people by another means if she failed. He believed her exaltation in the palace had a holy purpose. Esther's trust in God was the turning point in the story.

Pathways

Watch

Complete this viewer guide as you watch video session 3.

God owns everything over which He rules, and He rules over everything.

Many people build the ladder of success and find it leaning against the wrong wall because it's not tied to something bigger than themselves.

God wants to put every Christian on display for the ownership of God and His kingdom.

When God gives you human success, human opportunity, it's for a kingdom purpose.

The closer you get to seeing, realizing, and prioritizing a kingdom connection to your human opportunities, the more God can reveal His pathway to your purpose, because His providence has put you there.

God is the owner of your life, your opportunities, your success, and your ultimate obligation is to Him.

The definition of a blessing in the Bible is to experience and extend the goodness of God to others.

If you can't answer the question how your calling is benefiting others beyond you, you haven't yet made a kingdom decision.

Ownership versus Management

Discuss

Discuss the video with your group, using the following questions.

On the video Dr. Evans said, “God owns everything over which He rules, and He rules over everything.” What changes about the way we go through life when we realize who’s in charge of everything?

When you’re climbing a ladder of success, how do you know whether that ladder is leaning against the right wall?

Esther 4:14 is easily the most famous verse in Esther and one of the most famous verses in all of the Bible. Have you ever heard this verse before? If so, in what context was it quoted?

What opportunities has God given you for a kingdom purpose? How are you making the most of these opportunities?

Dr. Evans said many Christians don’t realize that God positions us where He desires for a much greater purpose. Why do you think so many Christians miss this truth?

How do you keep God’s agenda central in your life so that you don’t miss the connection between your opportunity and God’s purpose for your life?

Dr Evans said the definition of a blessing in the Bible is “to experience and extend the goodness of God to others.” Most of us understand blessing as experiencing the goodness of God. Why does true blessing call us to extend God’s goodness?

Reread Esther 4:14. What would have happened if Esther had refused to use her influence as the queen?

What does it teach us about God that He’s committed to His purposes with or without us? What does it teach us about God that He desires to use us in His purposes?

Read week 3 and complete the activities before the next group session.

Ownership versus Management

One reason we don't recognize God's goodness is that we confuse the means of His delivery with the source. Many times we think unless a blessing miraculously falls from heaven into our laps, it didn't come from God.

When you listen to music on a broadcast app on your smartphone, you can do so only because the smartphone is a method of delivery. There are no drums in the smartphone. No horns and no guitars reside in the equipment. The smartphone is only a conduit—a point of contact. Even when your smartphone stops working because your battery runs out, there's still music in the air. The smartphone simply receives a signal that comes from another source and delivers it to you. If you lose sight of that fact, you'll give the smartphone more credit than a smartphone ought to have. If you place too much weight on the medium, you'll forget the source. And if you forget the source, you'll feel no responsibility to Him when He asks you to sacrifice what you have for His greater good.

You'll be like the teenager who's reprimanded at home and grumbles to his parents, "I'm going to my room!" All the while the parent responds, "No, Son. You're going to *my* room. I just let you live there. And right at this moment, you're not going to my room. You're staying here until we've finished discussing this."

If you don't pay the bills, perform the upkeep, or purchase the items and furniture in the room, it's not your room. Similarly, the blessings and provision God has given you aren't yours. You're just a steward of all He has provided. As the owner of all, He reserves the right to ask you how to use His resources, even if that involves giving up something or someone in the process.

All of Esther's opportunities and gifts had been given to her "for such a time as this" (Esth. 4:14). God made her the queen so that when he desired to save His people, she would be in a position for Him to use her.

God is the owner; we're simply managers. Understanding ownership versus management will help you make decisions to serve God more readily.

This week's teaching draws out themes found in Esther 4:9-14.
Review this passage of Scripture before beginning your personal study.

◉ DAY 1 ◉

UNSHAKABLE KINGDOM

A number of years ago we decided to have our kitchen remodeled. The contractor came in and showed us some great plans. He showed us pictures of what the new cabinets would look like, samples of our options for wallpaper, and color cards with choices for paint. It was a glorious sight to see on paper what our new kitchen was going to look like. In fact, with so much excitement and anticipation about the new kitchen, we forgot about the process.

To get the kitchen remodeled, the old had to be torn out. The contractor had to tear up the floor, tear down the cabinets, move out the appliances, and sand down the walls. Things got so bad in our house that at one point we had to move in with our daughter to get away from the flying dust. We couldn't take it; we had to get out of there. But we wouldn't have been able to get a new kitchen if the old one hadn't been torn up first.

Many people want God to give them a new life, a new job, or a new situation, but they don't want Him to touch any of the existing details of their lives. If I had told my contractor that I didn't want him to touch anything, he would have told me that I didn't want to remodel. If I wanted new paint, a new floor, or new cabinets, none of that would have been possible if the old stuff hadn't been torn up first. We've got to trust God and give Him permission to tear things up in our lives so that He can make all things new.

List three of your common reactions or emotions during times when your life seems to be torn apart, dismantled, or disrupted. Why do you feel or react in these ways?

1.

2.

3.

Pathways

Read Esther 4:9-14. What kind of disruption would Mordecai's revelation cause to Esther? What was he asking her to give up to help her people?

Read the following verse.

This expression, "Yet once more," denotes the removing of those things which can be shaken, as of created things, so that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.

HEBREWS 12:27

What makes God's kingdom fundamentally different from the kingdoms we build for ourselves? Why is pursuing God's eternal purpose always better than clinging to our own goals and benefits?

Sometimes God has to break us and remove from us that which we've come to rely on in order to rebuild us with spiritual strength, focus, and stamina. It never feels good when He's removing things we rely on for security, but if we'll trust the process, we'll see a greater good on the other side. Esther had attained a position of power and prestige. No doubt she had accumulated a plethora of material goods during her reign as queen. Yet in order to obey God's leading in her life, she faced losing them all if the king didn't extend his golden scepter.

Have you ever sacrificed or risked losing something to obey God? What was the result?

Read the following verse.

I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship.

ROMANS 12:1

Ownership versus Management

What are the attributes of living sacrifices, as compared to a dead sacrifices like the ones placed on the altar in Old Testament times? In what ways does God ask us to offer our bodies and lives as living sacrifices today?

God's specific purpose and calling require that we give ourselves to Him daily as a sacrifice. The word *therefore* at the beginning of Romans 12:1 signals that Paul was making an argument. He was saying, "In light of what God has done for you (see Rom. 1-11), offer your life as a sacrifice to God." Mordecai was telling Esther something very similar. He was asking Esther to take her blessings and sacrifice them for others.

Are you here for God? Are you willing to allow Him to use you to benefit others and build His kingdom? Or is this life only about you? If it's only about you, your goals are selfishness and self-preservation. You remove yourself from God's covenant covering of favor as you seek to grab as many treasures as you can stuff into your pockets. Your redemption is not just for you. God wants to use you for the benefit of others.

Read the following verses and identify attributes of a living sacrifice.

Psalm 51:16-17

Matthew 9:13

Ephesians 5:2

Philippians 2:5-7

Hebrews 13:15-16

Does sacrifice always involve giving up a tangible item or person? Why or why not?

Pathways

How can offering ourselves as a sacrifice require us to change our attitude and demeanor toward others?

What are you willing (or unwilling) to give up or change to pursue God's kingdom purpose in your life?

We often limit our view of sacrificing for or obeying God to something we have to give up or stop doing. But Scripture tells us that showing love to others; sharing with others; praising and thanking God, even when we don't feel like it; and extending mercy, whether in word, thought, or action, are acceptable sacrifices. We can intentionally live with a spirit of sacrifice by modeling our choices after Christ's choices. The sacrifices and obedience we're called to may not always be as drastic or dramatic as Esther's risking her life by entering the king's throne room, but they're no less important. Be cautious not to devalue or belittle the obedience Christ has specifically called you to live out simply because it may not appear as grand as the sacrifices of someone you know or a character in Scripture. You're called to run your race and to walk faithfully on the pathway of your own God-ordained purpose.

★ PRAYER ★

Loving Lord, grow in me the ability to live as a sacrifice to You and for others. Help me show kindness, mercy, praise, generosity, and thanksgiving. Help me submit my thoughts, desires, and dreams to pursue Your heart and Your will for my life. In Christ's name, amen.

◉ DAY 2 ◉

YOUR USEFULNESS IN THE KINGDOM

Sand on a beach is free. You can walk onto any beach and pick up a handful of sand at no cost. Pick up as much as you want, sit in it, and rub your hands through it. It's free. But if you want to put that same sand on a playground, it will cost you something. You'll have to go to the store and buy bags of it to cover the surface of the playground. Why? Because it's being used differently. It's no longer free.

If you want sandpaper to work on a project, that's going to cost you something as well. Yes, it's still sand—sand glued onto paper. But you'll have to go to a store and pay for a very small amount of this sand. Though it's essentially the same free sand, a higher value has been placed on it due to its intended use.

If you go to Silicon Valley, where people are busy making computer chips with sand, you'll find an even higher price associated with sand. That's the most expensive sand we could come across, not because it's different but because it's used differently.

One reason God often can't do much with His people is that He isn't free to use them. They're like free sand, with no purpose, intention, focus, or skill. They're just hanging out on the beach. God is looking for Silicon Valley saints—saints who've learned that their value is tied to their usefulness in His kingdom.

Describe a time when God directed you to do something specifically for Him that involved your intention, focus, or skill.

What did you learn by obeying God in that situation?

Pathways

If a person walks around with one hundred dollars in his pocket but never uses it for what it was intended, it's just a piece of paper, meaningless until utilized for its purchasing power. God has assigned value to Christians. But until we live out our lives for their intended purposes, we walk around in a meaningless existence, valuable but not useful. A Christian life that isn't used for God's purposes is a life poorly spent.

Read Paul's direction.

Whether, then, you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:31

What does this verse reveal to you about the scope and breadth of your purpose in God?

Closely read Romans 12:2.

Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect.

ROMANS 12:2

List the three characteristics of God's purpose for you.

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Ownership versus Management

Recently, a single-service coffee maker in my kitchen stopped working. It would make all of the usual sounds when brewing a cup of coffee. It would light up as it should when brewing a cup of coffee. But no matter how long I stood there waiting for the cup of coffee to stream forth, nothing came out. You can imagine where this coffee maker wound up.

The coffee maker's usefulness determined where and how it was positioned. Likewise, your usefulness to the Lord and to His agenda determines the providential pathway He leads you on. Will you take the goodies and run? Or will you, like a wise manager, reinvest the assets of blessings He gives you to build greater opportunities for growth, influence, and impact?

Read Jesus' words in Luke 14:34. What happens to Christians when they lose their God-given purpose?

Read Esther 4:8-11. What was at stake for Esther if she went before the king? Can you identify with her response? Why or why not?

When Mordecai approached Esther and requested her to intervene on behalf of the Israelites, she balked. She paused. She stammered. There may have been many different reasons Esther didn't immediately respond. We may never know her exact reasons, but her response to Mordecai gives us a clue.

Mordecai ordered Esther to go before Ahasuerus (see v. 8). What motivated him to order her to go see the king? Do you think he may have anticipated her response?

Read Esther 4:10-11. What are the main reasons Esther didn't want to approach the king on behalf of the Jews?

Pathways

**How do we learn to push through fear and trust God's ultimate purpose?
When have you been called to do this?**

Initial reactions of fear can affect anyone. We're wired to protect ourselves. Many things in life may threaten or alarm us. However, discovering how to view the cause of our fears will give us the courage to push past our fears into faith. One time a dog was chasing my oldest granddaughter, who was about four or five years old. She was terrified. I don't think the dog was going to hurt her, but she didn't know that. She was crying and screaming as she ran to me as fast as her little legs would carry her. She was shouting my name: "Poppy! Poppy! Poppy!" That little girl was in a complete state of terror.

I ran to meet her and gathered her into my arms. She was huffing, heaving, and puffing, totally out of breath. The dog ran up to me, stopped short, and started barking. My granddaughter looked up at me and, noticing that the dog was no longer a threat, looked down at the dog and then up again at me. She looked back down at the dog and with renewed verve and vigor said, "Na-na-na-na-na!" Intimacy breeds confidence. When you're close to someone you love who has a lot more power than you do, you can piggyback on that power.

You can't overcome your fear through your own strength or courage, not at the level it takes to live in complete obedience to God. But as we'll see Esther eventually decide to do, when you seek to draw near to God in prayer, fasting, and intimacy, you'll discover a power greater than your fears.

✱ PRAYER ✱

Heavenly King, draw me close to You so that I'll have all I need to live in confident obedience to Your calling on my life. Show me the steps to take and empower me to take them. In Christ's name, amen.

◉ DAY 3 ◉

FOR SUCH A TIME AS THIS

A man used to lecture on child-rearing. A longtime professor, he had lectured through his single years and his parenting years, and his lectures had evolved over the years. When he was single, he began by calling his lectures “Ten Commandments for Parenting.” After his first child he had to change the title to “Ten Hints for Parenting.” After the second child it became “Ten Suggestions for Parenting.” When he had his third child, he stopped lecturing altogether. Anyone who has raised children understands that you don’t quite know all you thought you knew about parenting once you’ve had a kid or two. This is because children have been known to have minds of their own. Though the parent may be the authority, getting a child to do what you’d like them to do can prove difficult, especially after that child has grown into a young adult.

Mordecai wasn’t Esther’s father, but he had raised her. He knew her tendencies, personality, and preferences. He knew how she acted when she was happy and when she was sad. He knew whether she was naturally brave or naturally timid. And based on what he knew, he addressed her with regard to the Israelites’ need for her intervention with a bit of stern parenting.

First, as we saw yesterday, Mordecai ordered Esther to go to the king (see 4:8). Esther hedged in her reply. She pointed Mordecai to the risk involved in complying with his order. When Esther continued to refuse to go to the king despite having been ordered by her elder family member, Mordecai brought up a very good point.

Read Esther 4:13-14. Summarize Mordecai’s point in urging Esther to intervene.

How might this perspective change Esther's unwillingness to help the Israelites?

Pathways

What does it teach us about God to recognize that His plan will succeed with or without our cooperation?

In Esther 4:13-14 Mordecai reminded Esther of her higher purpose in God's plan for the nation of Israel. He recognized that she mistakenly thought by not risking her life in approaching the king, she could save it. Yet her life had already been marked. She was a Jew. Thus, Mordecai attempted to shape her theology by informing her that if she didn't rise to this occasion and muster the courage to approach the king, God would raise up a solution through someone else.

No one, not even Esther, is indispensable in God's plan. If He can create the universe from nothing, He doesn't need any of us to accomplish His designed will. No matter how talented, rich, or powerful we are, God never limits the accomplishment of His plan to one person. He always has another option. He always has another person to accomplish His purpose.

Read Psalm 75:7 and Daniel 2:21. What do these principles suggest about your role in God's ordained plans and purposes?

How should these principles influence your decision making?

Although God may have preferred to use Esther in the king's palace and had positioned her to be used for His purpose through her role and status, He could also have easily found someone else. God is never boxed into a corner. He always keeps His options open in carrying out His promises.

One of the most dangerous things you can do as a kingdom disciple is to think too highly of yourself. Yes, God may have chosen to bless or position you for His use in His divine plan. The moment you demonstrate that He can't use you for His kingdom purposes, He can just as easily raise up someone else to replace you.

Ownership versus Management

Disobedience to your kingdom calling puts you at risk of losing your kingdom calling. Wandering off the pathway of God's purpose puts you at risk of wandering in the wilderness of waste. God will never force you to fulfill your destiny. He will enable you to live out your purpose, but it's up to you, through your choices and character, to remain faithful to that purpose.

What are some factors that cause people to turn away from their calling?

Success is often the greatest deterrent to future success. Once someone tastes victory, whether it's in business, sports, or personal relationships, enlarged egos reduce drive and dependence on God. Pride swallows humility. Success can corrupt and can give birth to complacency.

Knowing these potential stumbling blocks, Mordecai had to make his point to Esther clear. In seeking to preserve the success she had attained up to that point, she was actually putting herself at the greatest risk of losing it. God had called Esther for this specific season and this specific need. If she chose to seek security over obedience, she could actually lose it all. Similarly, God has intentionally blessed and positioned you for His purpose.

When you choose to guard your blessings instead of extending them to others, you too become subject to Mordecai's rebuke. The greatest thing you could do to usher in a higher level of blessing in your life is to let go of the blessings you have now. Trust God with the outcome of His divinely ordained plan for your life as you recognize His true ownership and rulership over all.

★ PRAYER ★

God, I choose to surrender my life to You and to follow You in whatever ways You choose. Show me ways I've neglected my kingdom calling.
Make me useful in Your kingdom. Show me how to help others through the blessings You've given to me. In Christ's name, amen.

◉ DAY 4 ◉

IF I PERISH

Many people quote Mordecai's rebuke to Esther as a life verse to represent prestige, power, and favor. Shirts, hats, mugs, and social-media posts proudly proclaim, "For such a time as this" (Esth. 4:14). Few people truly connect Mordecai's words with their context.

**Have you ever quoted or shared the phrase "For such a time as this"?
If so, in what context?**

Esther was being scolded for her self-indulgent, self-preserving mindset. She was being reprovved for living large and embracing royalty over service. Through those telling words, Mordecai was reminding Esther that she had been chosen to set her own interests aside, let go of her own ambitions, and boldly face an enemy. Esther was to risk her life and her legacy with no guarantee of a positive outcome. That's the "For such a time as this" Esther was challenged to accept. And that's the "For such a time as this" God also sets before you.

God has given you your job, position, resources, education, relationships, and many more blessings. He has granted opportunities for you to optimize for His kingdom purposes. He didn't place you where you are so that you could lounge around all day or post pictures of yourself on social media. He placed you where you are because you're in the midst of a battle, a war. You're in the midst of a seismic conflict involving good versus evil. To miss your kingdom assignment because you've become too caught up in your personal kingdom would be the greatest tragedy you could ever face.

Why is it so easy for us to miss God's sacrificial calling? How have you mistaken comfort for calling?

Ownership versus Management

In what ways do we seek to remove risk and sacrifice from our contemporary view of following Christ? In what ways does our culture contribute to this tendency?

Mordecai's rebuke shook Esther, reminding her of the reality she lived in rather than the façade she had come to believe was real. Her response indicated that she understood what he was saying. Esther chose to take a risk in response to the need of her fellow Jews:

Esther told them to reply to Mordecai, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

ESTHER 4:15-16

Faith is risky business because you can't see it. The opposite of faith is sight. If you can see it, it's not faith. If you can know the outcome, it's not faith. If you can see the destination during every twist and turn on the pathway, it's not faith. Following a global-positioning system that outlines the entire path all the way to your destination isn't faith. Faith is acting on what you don't see. Faith is believing God's Word and taking one step even though that step is all you can see, simply because you believe God wants you to do it. Faith is taking a step without being assured of the destination.

Most of us don't mind taking a step when we can guarantee the outcome. But risky faith isn't based on a guarantee. Esther-faith isn't based on a guarantee. The greater the uncertainty, the greater the faith and dependence on God.

Read Esther 4:16. What was Esther's response to Mordecai?

Why do you think Esther asked everyone to fast for three days?

Pathways

Based on this verse, how do we know Esther wasn't assured of a positive outcome?

Esther made the decision to risk her life for the good of others, specifically stating, "If I perish, I perish." She knew her husband's history. She knew he had a volatile spirit. She knew of Vashti's banishment. She knew the risk involved in approaching him uninvited. Yet Mordecai had reminded her that her obedience to God was necessary, not only for her own personal survival but also for that of her people.

Esther didn't know whether the king would hold out his scepter. But because she knew she'd been given a unique, royal opportunity for such a time as this to save her people from certain death, she chose to take that step of faith.

Throughout the Bible, people had to take risky steps of faith whenever God wanted to do something big through them. Their spiritual entrepreneurialism compelled them to take risks, acting on God's Word and His leading, in order to invest in a greater spiritual future. Esther was a strategic spiritual entrepreneur. She knew what she was up against. That's why she asked everyone to fast for three days and nights. If she was going to risk her well-being on their behalf, she needed them to invest in this battle as well. No war is ever won by one foot soldier. Esther was wise enough to realize this, and she sought spiritual support. She knew she needed to go before the heavenly King prior to approaching the earthly king.

Has there been a time in your life when you felt you needed to fast and pray about something? What did you do, and what were the results?

Have you ever fasted on behalf of someone else, or has someone fasted for you? What happened in that situation? Did the joint fasting have an impact on your relationship?

Ownership versus Management

As we continue our study of the life of Esther, I want to encourage you to open your eyes and recognize God's purposes for you. God desires to use you. God wants to bless you. God chooses to empower you. But He also wants to see your faith in action. He wants to see you choose obedience over self-preservation.

With so much disintegration occurring in our homes, communities, and culture these days, we need to step out into the uncertainty of faith while following the certainty of the One who calls us. We need to restore hope and call people to transformed lives by modeling what it means to be a true kingdom disciple who actively engages in God's divine plan for the world.

When God reveals what He's asking you to do, be willing to do it. No matter the cost. No matter the potential for loss. No matter the risk. You've been called to the kingdom for a purpose much greater than your personal pleasure and gain. You've been called to the kingdom of God for such a time as this.

Whom do you know who's risking much for the sake of the kingdom? Stop and pray for him or her right now. Also pray that when called, you'll obey without hesitation.

* PRAYER *

Heavenly Father, I want to know Your will for my life, and I don't want my biases and desire for self-preservation to stand in the way of what You're asking me to do. I'm grateful for Your blessings and the open doors You've given to me. Help me use them to accomplish Your will and bring good to others in Your name. Show me areas of my life in which I'm holding on too tightly to what You've given to me. Show me how to maximize the resources You've provided—time, talents, and treasures—in such a way that You receive glory. In Christ's name, amen.

◉ DAY 5 ◉

THE RIGHT OF FIRST REFUSAL

Esther recognized that God had raised her to a position that would allow her to seek a remedy for her people. Mordecai's rebuke to her reminded her that God's will and God's ways were above her own. Therefore, she chose to step out in faith and approach the king. We saw in yesterday's lesson that before doing that, however, she asked the people to fast and pray with her for three days.

The combination of God's sovereign control—His ability to raise up whomever He wishes in order to fulfill His plan—and His allowance of our involvement within that control raises a great question on providence. Because God is sovereign and can do whatever He chooses to do, could we assume that what we do doesn't really matter? Such a worldview is called fatalism. Fatalism reflects a mindset that distances personal choice from consequences. But fatalism isn't biblical.

While Scripture emphatically teaches that God is sovereign, it also teaches that God uses people as part of the movements in history. God doesn't dismiss what we do; He uses it. Yes, God could have raised up someone else other than Esther to redeem His people. But Esther's choice to allow God to use her set in motion a legacy of good through her influence. Esther's influence thus stretched beyond this single incident.

Read the following verses.

*God is not a man, that He should lie,
Nor a son of man, that He should repent;
Has He said, and will He not do it?
Or has He spoken, and will He not make it good?*

NUMBERS 23:19

*I know that You can do all things,
And that no purpose of Yours can be thwarted.*

JOB 42:2

Ownership versus Management

*All the inhabitants of the earth are accounted as nothing,
But He does according to His will in the host of heaven
And among the inhabitants of earth;
And no one can ward off His hand
Or say to Him, "What have You done?"*

DANIEL 4:35

What are three truths you learn from these passages?

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

Even though God is sovereign, what are some ways He allows us to participate in His plans?

Our personal freedom of choice doesn't contradict or conflict with God's sovereignty. Although God could have used someone else if Esther had refused to help, His sovereignty provided the boundaries for her to move forward on her pathway to purpose. God's restrictions don't negate our freedoms; in fact, they enhance them.

For example, a tennis player isn't free to play tennis if there's no baseline. A baseball player isn't free to play baseball if there's no foul line. A football player isn't free to play football if there are no sidelines. Boundaries exist in athletic games to maximize the competition. The reason God allows boundaries is to create the opportunity for us to take full advantage of our freedom.

You can't be free without restrictions. A fish isn't free to roam the jungle. It wasn't made for that. A lion isn't free to live in the ocean because it wasn't made for that. Freedom is receiving the benefits you were created to receive. Freedom doesn't mean there are no boundaries. Freedom means that within God's ordained boundaries you can live out your purpose.

Pathways

Esther chose to live out her purpose by remaining within the boundaries God had established.

List other boundaries that enable freedom to be experienced.

Why are boundaries so important? In what ways does God's sovereignty contribute to our ability to maximize our purpose in life?

A little boy was playing at a pond. His little toy boat was floating on the water and began to drift out where he couldn't reach it. Shortly a man came by and, seeing the boat out in the pond, picked up stones and threw them on the other side of the boat.

The boy didn't understand what the man was trying to do. The stones were causing quite a disturbance in the water and clearly weren't hitting the mark. Yet in time something interesting began to happen. As the man continued to throw stones into the pond, they created ripples of water that pushed the boat back toward where he and the boy were standing. Before long the boy had his boat once again.

God's sovereignty often doesn't make sense to us. His providential choices can seem as if they're missing the mark of what we'd like Him to do. Yet in His patience He continues. When we discover the power of obedience and faith in the face of what doesn't make sense, we'll reap the benefits of His providential movement in the circumstances and relationships in our lives. Like Esther, we can walk forward in the pathway to purpose predetermined by God's sovereign plans. But if we refuse to take that step, we can lose what had once been designated as ours. That's what happened to another member of royalty, King Saul.

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-11. How did Saul transgress the plans God had for Him? What was God's response to Saul's unwillingness to obey?

Ownership versus Management

When Saul refused to obey, God chose another king in David (see 1 Sam. 16:12-23). What does this example teach us about God's commitment to accomplish His will despite our failure?

How can we develop an Esther-like attitude, which wants to obey God even when it's costly, instead of a Saul-like attitude, which seeks to save our own skin?

A common business term is called the right of first refusal. It gives a business owner the right to either accept or reject any new business proposals brought forward by the other entity named in the contract. This opportunity occurs before the other entity can take its business idea to a third party. Once the right of first refusal has been turned down, the other entity can approach another business with the new concept.

God felt sorrow over Saul's rejection of His calling. God assigns a calling to you. Yet like King Saul, you can disobey and refuse to carry it out according to God's commands and direction. In that sense you're turning it down, and God can assign it to someone else. But like Esther, you also have the right to live out your purpose in faith under God's overarching rule. The decision is up to you. God will never force you to follow the pathway He has created for you. But if you do, you'll discover that He has a plan that will bless not only you but many others through you as well.

★ PRAYER ★

Dear Lord, enable me to live like Esther with faith and wisdom to fulfill my purpose. Keep me from taking the path of King Saul, which merged personal gain and selfishness with Your purposes. Show me my pathway and light it with Your Word. In Christ's name, amen.