

ESTHER -



“Building Blocks”

1. **(Q1)** It is vital to see Esther as someone willing to be led, to submit to authority and wisdom. Her response to Mordecai was one of submission to *authority*, but her willingness to follow Hegai’s counsel was a deference to *wisdom and experience*.
2. **(Q2b)** While it might sound extreme, there is a need for a “theology of beauty.” In other words, what does the Bible teach about the types of beauty, the *purpose* of beauty, the “dark side” of beauty, the value of beauty, etc. To *not* have a theology of beauty, my ideas about it are wrapped around circumstance, genetics, cosmetics, etc. rather than God. We may speak about someone being “endowed” with certain physical features, but pushed to its limits, this thinking often turns out to be nothing more than some vague sense of luck, grooming or genetics.

There is actually no mention of the word, “beauty” in our New Testaments. The three verses typically cited (1 Pet 3:3,4; 1 Tim 2:9) do *not* say *anything* about “beauty,” even though the NIV inserts the word in all three verses:

ESV	NIV
“Do not let your adorning be external—the braiding of hair and the putting on of gold jewelry, or the clothing you wear—” 1 Peter 3:3	“Your [<i>beauty</i>] should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes.” 1 Peter 3:3
“...but let your adorning be the hidden person of the heart with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God’s sight is very precious.” 1 Peter 3:4	“Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading [<i>beauty</i>] of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God’s sight.” 1 Peter 3:4
“...likewise also that women should adorn themselves in respectable apparel, with modesty and self-control, not with braided hair and gold or pearls or costly attire,” 1 Timothy 2:9	“I also want women to dress modestly, with decency and propriety, not with braided hair or gold or pearls or expensive clothes,” 1 Timothy 2:9

The only place a verb appears in the verses in 1 Peter is actually in verse 5, *For in this way in former times the holy women also, who hoped in God, used to adorn [kosmeō] themselves, being submissive to their own husbands...*”

The verb translated “adorn” in 1 Tim 2:9 means “to ornament,” “to adorn,” “to garnish.” Paul’s burden here is that it is the “woman” who is being “adorned,” and the issue is *not* whether, but with what and why.

3. **(Q3)** Jesus’ statement in Matthew 6:33 is an excellent supplemental scripture on this subject. It appears in his concluding remarks after a long discussion about obsessive anxiety over “means” items (clothing, food, housing). He is, in truth, cautioning them

about *not* allowing “means” (to the kingdom and God’s righteousness) become “ends” in themselves. When that happens, the disciple is thinking exactly as a person *outside* the Kingdom (i.e. a “Gentile” or a “tax collector”).

4. **(Q4, Luke)** The trip from Nazareth to Jerusalem was about 70 miles; an “easy” 4-day walk under normal conditions. And, the purpose of this census was *financial*. Joseph and Mary would most likely incur a tax “penalty” from this census. Rome was “counting noses” to know what their “tax base” was. The inconvenience and distaste of this journey can not be overstated. Also, Mary was within a week of her due date. The Jews as a people had no fondness for Rome’s presence in their lives and in Palestine, period. It is amazing that God was using something so unpleasant, so costly and so offensive, to assure that Micah 5:2 was fulfilled!
5. **(Q8)** This whole concept of “being an Esther” really has *two* facets to it. One is obvious, the other is more subtle. But, both are very important. The first one is POSITION. Esther’s “position” gave her access to the most powerful man on the planet. As Queen of the Persian Empire, she was already physically “planted” in a location absolutely “closed” to the rest of the world, much less the Jews! For us, this is *not* a question of status or importance, but rather access. Who do I have access to that is/are inaccessible to most people? Then, I have to ask myself, “why me?”

The second facet is PROVISION. Esther didn’t win the “Persian Lottery” or some game show, “So You Want to be a Queen?” She was selected (in the human flow of events) because of her *beauty*. God had provided her with unusual beauty. *This was His way* of getting Esther into the palace. We need to ask ourselves, “What provisions has God made to me?” What do I have that others do not, and have I viewed *them* as a unique way for God to use me, or have I given all my energies to cultivate, duplicate or imitate some other “provision”?



“Stumbling Stones”

6. **(Overall)** The fact that God’s name is never mentioned in this book actually serves to accentuate the overall theme of God’s providence in the lives of His children. This truth is best taught by leaving God’s *name* out of the book, but leaving his “fingerprints” on every page. The inevitable conclusion is that God is always working *behind the scenes* to accomplish His purposes *and* take care of His children
7. **(Q1a)** Be careful that you don’t allow the discussion to wander from the heart of this question: “*What can you discern about ESTHER...*”
8. **(Q8a)** This is a question designed more to reveal motive and perspective than anything else. What you are looking for as a leader is *why* someone is doing what she is doing with her life. Are they where they are because it’s what they always wanted to do, because “things didn’t work out,” or is there some sense that God had led them, or squeezed them into it? Listen for God’s “fingerprints” in their explanation.



“Going Deeper”

1. **(Overall)** This question can be used wherever you think it best fits the discussion. “Where do you see God in the Book of Esther, considering that He’s never mentioned?” “Do you see any application from what you just said for your own life?” Explain.
2. **(Q1)** Do you think of obedience to God as Him asking you to do things that are always reasonable and sensible? Explain.
3. **(Q2b)** How does your current understanding of the purpose of beauty compare with this story?
4. **(Q4)** How are the stories of Joseph and Esther similar? How are they different?
5. **(Q5)** Have group members share responses to this question. Seek to help them wrestle with the larger issue of trying to balance *trust* in God’s loving sovereignty *and* His wisdom. In other words, if *you* needed to get a Jew into a top political position in the most powerful government in the world (e.g. Egypt, Persia), how would *you* get him/her in there?
6. **(Q7)** What does John 15:15 add to this discussion?
7. **(Q9)** Have group members share their responses to this question. Take time to pray for each person, either for grace to see clearly and change, or for grace to nurture and strengthen what is right and true.