

ESTHER: CALLED TO PRAY

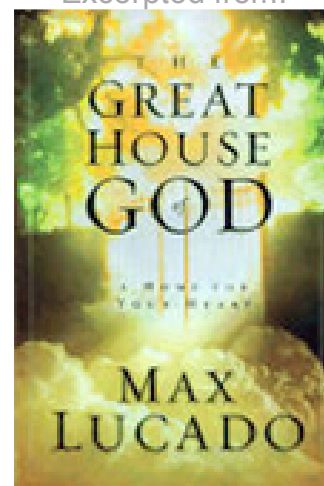
By Max Lucado

I wish I could introduce you to a friend of mine by the name of Diane. Diane has such earnest eyes. Such a sweet demeanor. But don't let the softness of her appearance fool you. Because deep down within, Diane is a warrior. She's a prayer warrior. And she takes both her battle and her weapons very seriously. Long before you and I are awake on a typical day, she's already at battle. Long before you and I are stirring our coffee, she's already stirring the heart of God.

She lives in a small apartment on the West coast and she keeps a bulletin board on the wall. And tacked to the bulletin board are names of people for whom she's promised to pray—pictures over which she prays. People sick. People discouraged. People serious about their faith. And because she prays on a given day a road that appeared bumpy for a missionary the day before might appear smooth. Because she prays an addict might feel temptation pass just a bit soon. A mother sorrowful over the loss of her child might find grief sweeter. They won't know why that day was better, but Diane will and God will.

I wish you could meet Diane, but the chances of that are not very strong, because Diane's body is so invaded by Multiple Sclerosis she seldom leaves her apartment. She has to have somebody lift her out of her bed and set her in a wheel chair. She can't button a button. She can't feed herself. And from the earthly perspective, her life is very insignificant. But from heavenly perspective, she wields more power than the

Excerpted from:



White House, because she prays. And she reminds us of this principle, and that is, a little person becomes a giant on their knees before God. I wish you could meet Diane.

I also wish I could introduce you to Roger. Roger, like Diane, is a prayer warrior. He takes his prayers very seriously. But Roger doesn't pray for people that he never sees. He prays for people that he sees and he prays all day for people he sees every day. At his station in the workshop where he works he works his way around the other faces, always praying, and while his hands are busy, his mind is interceding for these people. Even in the cafeteria, rather than just eat, he prays while he eats. He'll literally go from face to face around the cafeteria and pray. And at night when everyone else is in bed, he quietly slips out of his bunk, kneels beside the cot on the hard, concrete floor, and he prays.

I wish you could meet Roger. He would tell you that he would rather be anywhere than in this maximum security prison. He's not proud of what he did. But he'd also tell you that if going to prison is what it took for him to meet his Savior, he'd go to prison again. And he feels as if he's not a person on death row, but rather a missionary to the prison. That's his assignment. His feet may never know the free ground again, but still he prays. And he reminds us that a little person becomes a giant when they are on their knees before God.

I wish you could meet Diane or Roger, but there's a third person I really wish you could meet. Her name is a bit different. You've probably never heard this name: Hadassah. It would be very difficult for you to meet Hadassah. You'd have to journey across the ocean. You'd have to learn another language. You'd have to enter a new world of thrones and scepters and palaces and kings and queens. But, though her world is an atlas apart from yours and from Roger's and Diane's, her world is identical to theirs in that she has learned this power of prayer. She has learned what happens when an honest person with real needs stands before the king and makes a request.

Unlike Roger and Diane, we don't have to speculate about the answer to Hadassah's prayers. The answer to her prayer is recorded. So much so, that there is a nation on the earth that celebrates her prayer still to this day every year. They have a feast commemorating the prayers of Hadassah. Because she prayed, people who were sentenced to be annihilated in 127 different countries lived to see another day.

Wouldn't you like to meet Hadassah? I would. It would be very difficult, since she lived five centuries before Christ. So until we're in heaven, I guess we'll just have to settle for reading her story. It's in the Bible. It's in the book of the Old Testament that's named after her, that bears her other name: Esther. Hollywood could never compare with the story of Esther. How many of you have ever heard the story? Then you know the drama and you know the passion. And you know about Hamaan, the evil culprit who wanted to exterminate the Jewish people. You know about Mordecai, the gutsy cousin of Esther, who refused to bow in his presence. You've heard the phrase of Mordecai when he said, "*For such a time as this, you are called to be queen.*" And you know the response of Esther: "*If I perish, I perish.*" It's full of lines. It's full of moments.

But what I would like for you to see today is that the book of Esther is more than just a historical, factual story, which it is. It is a true, historical event, again, commemorated by the Jewish people every year at the Feast of Purim. But it's much more than that. It's a spiritual analogy. It's a picture—a dramatization of what happens when you pray. And all the main characters found in the book of Esther are found in your life. Let me tell you what I mean.

The king in the story in the book of Esther is a man by the name of Xerxes. As far as I know, he's the only man in the Bible whose name begins with an X. (If you ever answer that question on Jeopardy, I get \$64 of your \$120.) He has another name, which is Ahaserarus, which is remarkably akin to what happens when you have a cold. You don't have to worry about that name. Xerxes is the one that we are going to be using today. King Xerxes ruled ancient Persia, as an absolute sovereign king. Please underline the word "absolute." All he had to do was raise his eyebrow and destiny would be changed in any of the 127 provinces that were under his control. They ranged from as far off as Ethiopia up through what is called today Turkey over to India. And he ruled with a rule of a Persian king.

In that sense, he is a picture of our King—the King of Kings, the Almighty God. And in the story of Esther, he reminds us of the one with absolute sovereignty. For though you may think that you are the one determining your destiny, God has already determined your destiny, and your role is to respond or not respond to what He's called you to be. He's the One who has dug out the trench of the river of history and

your choice is simply whether or not you want to be obedient or not.

King Xerxes has a right-hand man. This right-hand man is named Hamaan, which, again, has a curious connotation. It sounds a lot like hangman. And if you know the end of the story, you know why that's kind of curious. Hamaan is the right-hand man of King Xerxes, and you read every word about Hamaan and you don't find one good corpuscle in the guy's body. He was evil from top to bottom, inside and out. And he had only one desire, and that was for everybody in Persia—really around the world—to bow before him. That was his aim in life was to have your worship and my worship. He wants everybody to bow before him.

And somewhere along the line, he's gotten a bit aggravated at this peculiar minority which lives in the great lands of Persia, called the Jewish people. And he has decided that the world would be better off without the Jews. So he convinces King Xerxes that these people should be annihilated. He calls for a world-wide holocaust. And on a given day, King Xerxes says, "Alright, we'll do that on that day." Hamaan goes as far as even to fund the project. So everything is set in motion for all the Jewish people to be annihilated.

Now, Hamaan in this story, represents Satan. Because just as Hamaan has no good desire in his system, so Satan has nothing good about him. You need to understand, and ever so often it's good for us to remind each other, that Satan hates you. He hates you. He hates you, because you are made in the image of God. And he hates anyone who reminds him of God. Consequently, he has but one aim, and that is to destroy the promised people—to destroy God's children. He has set out on the task of interrupting God's plan. Whatever that means, he's going to do it. In this case, it meant exterminating the Jewish people. Because to exterminate the Jewish people meant to exterminate the Jewish lineage. And to exterminate the Jewish lineage meant there would be no Jesus. And Satan's highest aim is to keep us out of the presence of Jesus. Because when we bow before Christ, we don't bow before Satan, see. And so, if he can destroy the Jews, then that will interrupt the plan. And ever since he lied to Eve in the garden, that's all he's been about. He wants to interrupt the plan. He wants to keep the presence of God out of your life. And if that means a holocaust in Persia, if that means infanticide in Bethlehem, if that means a crucifixion at Calvary, or if that means temptation on a Friday night, he'll do it—whatever it takes. You live in the

crosshairs of his scope, forever being analyzed, sought after, and he's pursuing you. That's very important.

Paul would tell you that our battle is not against flesh and blood. But our battle is against the spiritual forces of this present darkness. So that's where our battle is being fought. And that's exactly who Hamaan represents. Satan is up to no good. The Bible says that he has come to cheat and to kill and to destroy. The Bible also says that he is filled with anger because he knows he does not have much time. So he is busy at work plotting and cunning, wanting to steal and take what is not yours. That's why, by the way, he's very unhappy that you're reading this. He really is. You just kind of gave him a kick in the shins by being here. Because we're at a point in the Lord's prayer that he really wished we had not gotten to. I mean, it bothered him that we talked about our Father, who is in heaven, hallowed be Thy name. But when we begin to pray, "Thy kingdom come," he realizes that we are, at that point, making and fulfilling the highest Christian duty that exists. You see, to pray, "Thy kingdom come," is to say this: "God, let your manifest presence be felt in my life. I want Your kingdom around me. And I realized in a kingdom, there's one king and there's one throne. And I'm voluntarily stepping off of that throne. And Satan doesn't occupy that throne. You occupy that throne. Now You be King. You be Sovereign. Take complete control. Guide me. Lead me."

When you pray, "Thy kingdom come," you're saying, "God, come. Come into this part of my life that's broken. Come into this part of my home that's evil. Step into that relationship where there's incest. Go over there where there's adultery. Deal with that problem of pornography. Where there is drug addiction, be Lord. Wherever there's a challenge. Wherever there's something evil, I need You to come." And we surrender and say, "I can't do it anymore. I've got a relationship I can't figure out. I've got kids I can't understand. I've got parents who don't listen to me. Please. Please, God. Come, kingdom!"

The phrase in the imperative tense in the Greek, which means it deserves an explanation point at the end. And you can literally pray it like this: "Come, kingdom! Come!" You're storming the gates of heaven. And you're saying, "God, I need you to come, and I need You to come now!" And you say, "Well, Max, who am I to pray like that? Who am I to make such a bold request of God?" Let me tell you who you are. You're His child. You're His kid. You're His creation. And He just waits for you to

come and say, “Come!” Ask and you shall receive. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be open to you. He didn’t say, “Ask and maybe I can help you out on a good day.” He said, “*Ask you shall receive. Seek you shall find.*” The most reliable, the most confident step you can make, is the step of prayer. Therefore, when you come into the presence of God, don’t come whimpering, don’t come calloused, don’t come sleepy, don’t offer these insomnia prayers. Come to Him and come boldly into the presence of God. That’s what the Hebrew writer says. “*So let us come boldly to the very throne of God.*”

And look at this—and stay there, stay there—just like Roger lingers in a state of prayer for the prison—you stay there. Just like Diane stays there in the presence of God. You stay there and you never really have to leave the presence of God. You thought you got that new job because you deserved a promotion. I’m telling you, you got that new job because God wants you to stay there and pray for those people. You thought you were moved into that neighborhood because it was the best house you could find. I’m telling you that you are an assigned missionary to that neighborhood to pray for those people. You thought you were given that fourth grade class to teach just because the other teacher got sick and you got to be the substitute. Wrong! You were sent to that class because those 26 children need somebody to pray over them. You thought you were given this nation because you just happened to follow a certain lineage of a certain generation. Wrong! God has assigned you and He has assigned me to be prayer warriors for this nation, to intercede.

And I would go as far as to say this, church, that a day that passes that you don’t invite God’s kingdom to come into your world is a day wasted. That’s your highest call. That’s your most noblest task, that when you are called, when you stand before God, He lowers that scepter and He invites you to reach out and touch it. And upon touching that scepter, He’s saying to you, “What is it that you want? I will hear you.” Let us then come boldly into the presence of God—boldly, young people—boldly, mothers—boldly, fathers—boldly, older saints—boldly. May God raise up out of this church people who just live in the presence of God. May He just turn us into a bunch of praying people. You know? We don’t really know where we’re headed. We’re not sure how we’re going to get there, but we’re going to stand in the presence of God and we’re praying—please hear this—for San Antonio to be a place where God’s kingdom is felt.

My prayer lately has been, “God, if You’re looking for a church for revival, we volunteer. Let this be the place. Let this be the place where you do it all again. Let Your manifest presence be felt. Let it be known.” It’s almost like connecting two hot wires and allowing the presence of God to come from here over to there and you just get that jolt that goes right in between in it. We’re the intercessors. That’s what Jesus is doing right now. I’m sorry I didn’t think far enough in advance to bring these verses to put up on the screen. We’ve studied them before, though. We know that Jesus right now is interceding for you. He spent three years preaching. He’s spent the last 2000 years praying. See how important prayer is in the kingdom of God? That’s why you’re assigned your family. That’s why you’re assigned that work place. That’s why you are there—to be a constant sense of the presence of God in that workplace. And to quietly all day long to be saying, “Come, Thy kingdom. Come here.” That secretary that’s grumpy, “Come.” That boss who’s cranky, “Come.” And you will permeate that place with the very presence of God. That’s what you’re called to be. That’s what you’re called to do.

Well, God has given us this promise in 1 John, chapter five and verse 14: “And if we ask for anything that agrees with what He wants, He hears us.” What God is doing is He is offering us the privilege of being a part of His strategy. When we come before Him and we say, “I don’t know how You’re going to do it, but please do it. Your ways are not my ways and I’m not going to complain at Your timing, though I would like to have it real soon. But I want Your will in this matter.” And we can be sure that after we pray that prayer, the world is different than before we prayed. Do you agree? After you pray, the world is different than it was before you prayed it. Else why pray? If it’s not going to change the world, we don’t need to do it.

But, apparently, Jesus knew it would change the world, because He was the One who would get up early in the morning. He was the One who would spend all night in prayer. He was the One who went to the Garden of Gethsemane and recruited three prayer partners who fell asleep while He was praying. He was the One who urged us to always pray in Luke chapter 18, verse 1 and never lose hope. His timing may be different. His approach may be different, but you can bet when you come into His presence, He lowers the scepter like he did for Esther, which takes us back to the story of Esther.

In this story where Xerxes represents God and Hamaan represents Satan, guess who represents you—Esther. Esther does. You and Esther have a lot in common. You see, Esther was an abandoned orphan. We don't know why her parents left, but she was an abandoned orphan. We are, too. We have no name. We have no future. But somebody has come with kindness and adopted us. Our King has adopted us. In this case, Mordecai, her cousin, raised her. He was more than just a father. He was also a counselor to her. And when a new queen was needed to serve in Persia—we're making a very long story short here by not even talking about why the new queen was needed—and suffice it to say she entered the Miss Persia contest and won. And the king had a new queen. Mordecai, then, comes along as her counselor. Mordecai in the book of Esther represents the role of the Holy Spirit, because you, too, have the Holy Spirit who comes along as your counselor, who urges you, who gives you advice. And he wisely told Esther not to reveal that she was a Jewish girl. And so she comes to inherit the throne as a queen and nobody knows she's Jewish. He was also the one who told her to go to King Xerxes and plead for mercy because of what Hamaan was about to do.

Now, she was resistant to do that, which may strike you as curious. It does me. I would think that the first thing I would do would be to plead for help. So she explains to Mordecai why she doesn't want to go and talk to King Xerxes. In Esther chapter 4 and verse 11 she says, *“No man or woman may go to the king in the inner courtyard without being called. This is the rule. This is the protocol of the day. There is only one law about this. Anyone who enters must be put to death, unless the king holds out his gold scepter. Then that person may live. And I have not been called to go to the king for 30 days.”*

Well, as peculiar and remote as it may sound to us, it was the practice of the kingdom that nobody, not even the queen, could go into the throne room unless he or she was first invited. And if they go in and the king does not lower his scepter, which is his symbolic act of receiving them, they lose their heads. And Esther kind of likes her head. And she's not ready to take that risk. So Mordecai comes to her and offers this word of encouragement, just like the Holy Spirit comes to you and offers you words of encouragement. He says, *“Just because you think you live in a king's palace, don't think that out of all the Jewish people you alone will escape. If you keep quiet at this time, someone else will help and save the Jewish people. But you and your father's*

family will all die. And who knows? You may have been chosen queen for such a time as this.”

Note, please that Mordecai is confident that the Jewish people will be delivered. He’s not worried about the salvation of the Jewish people. He knows that somebody is going to come along and save them, because they are the lineage through which Jesus will be born. He speaks with the wisdom like the Holy Spirit speaks to us. At question here is not the existence of the people. At question here is the role that Esther plays in God’s drama. At question in your life is not whether there will someday be a heaven and whether there someday will be a hell, whether God will eventually reign supreme. That’s going to happen. At question is whether Max Lucado is going to be on His side or not.

Esther is told that unless you get involved, your family is going to suffer. Well, I’m not very smart, but I can make that translation. Unless I align myself with my King, my family is going to suffer. Your family is going to suffer. Your circle will suffer. On the other hand, your family will be blessed. Your family will be upheld. Your holiness—your sense of holiness and constant intercession for your family will be honored, if you do align yourself with the King.

Now, we got to move quickly here. Here’s what Esther responds with in chapter 4 and verse 16. She says, *“Go and get all the people in Susa together. For my sake, give up eating. Do not eat or drink for three days night or day. Then I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I die, I die.”*

Now, if you’ve ever read the story of Esther, what you’re wanting to do right now is fast-forward to that conversation she had with King Xerxes. But hold on for just a second. I want to give you one paragraph worth here that’s very important. You have just read about the heroes of the book of Esther. Mordecai is worth of our applause. Esther is worth of our adulation. But the real heroes are these unnamed citizens, who spent three days in fasting and prayer. And if King Xerxes will receive Queen Esther, it is only because these people have first gone to their King and stood in His presence. Much is said about the fact that the book of Esther is the only book in the Bible where God’s name is never mentioned. His imprint is found on every page, but His name never appears. I think equally curious is the fact that no religion is ever mentioned. No temple. No priest. No church. Just honest people—cobblers and cooks and crooks

and your regular folks that live in a neighborhood who know that the whole world is tumbling in unless they pray. And so they, in an act of desperate courage say, “We will pray.” These are the heroes of the story. And my hunch is when we all get home, we’re going to find who the true heroes are of our story.

What happens next? Chapter 5 and verse 1: “*And on the third day, Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner courtyard in the king’s palace, facing the king’s hall.*” Please note this very important point—Esther is no dummy. Just because you pray, that doesn’t give you license for inactivity. You don’t pray for a job and never submit a resume. You don’t ask God for guidance and never read His word. I don’t ask God to bless a sermon and never study. And Esther knew better than to ask for an audience with the king and saunter into his presence in curlers and cut-offs. We’ve already been told in Esther chapter 2 that she was blessed with a beautiful face and a beautiful figure. So she takes that beautiful figure and she begins to décor it in such a fashion that she will get the king’s attention. And there she stands at the outside of the throne room.

Now, I’m not going to begin to try to imitate how she was standing. But let your imagination go for just a bit. She’s no dummy. And she knows it’s been 30 days since the king has seen his queen. And there he is. He’s seated on the throne in the throne room. On either side of him are a couple of burly-chested guards. Behind him is a chattering eunuch. Ahead of him is a long list of things he has to get done that day. And she steps forth just within eye shot like she stepped right off the cover of *Mademoiselle* magazine. And he’s sitting up there reading his copy of *Car and Chariot*. And he slips down in his throne and he notices her out of the corner of his eye and he just says, “Esther!”

Here’s exactly how it reads. “*When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, he was pleased.*” Now, I’m no Hebrew scholar, but here’s how I’d like to translate that verse. “When the king saw Queen Esther standing in the courtyard, he said, ‘A hubba, hubba, hubba! And he held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther went forward and touched the end of it.’”

Do you see the picture there? Do you see the picture of the Bride of Christ—the Church—coming into the presence of God and He lowers His scepter and we touch it.

And what the king said to Esther, “What is it that you want? I’ll grant it to you up to half of my kingdom.”

We don’t have time to really embellish the rest of the story. But please remember the story doesn’t end there. There’s still the two feasts. She throws a party. And she invites the king and Hamaan to attend. There’s still Hamaan, who is still aggravated at Mordecai, because Mordecai is the only person in all of Susa who will not bow before him. So Hamaan decides he is going to build some gallows and string up Mordecai. Well, at the end of the second feast, the king is so curious why Esther keeps asking him to come to these feasts, so finally, he says, “Come on. Just tell me. What is it that you want? I’ll really give it to you up to half of the kingdom.” And so she sheepishly looks down at the ground and she looks up and bats her eyes at him and gives him a smile. And she says, “Well, there is one intsy, wintsy little bitty favor you can do. You see, there’s this raging anti-semite, who has come into our country. And he is hell bent on destroying all of the Jewish people, and I don’t know if I’ve ever mentioned to you, honey, but I’m Jewish. And if he kills them, then he kills me, and you don’t want that, do you, honey?”

And he, now emboldened by testosterone, stands and says, “Tell me who this man is?” Well, by now, Hamaan, he’s ducking and he’s looking, and he’s trying to find an exit and he wants out of there. And Esther turns and she points that finger right at him. And the king is so infuriated that he has to go out and find him some Prozac. And by the time he comes back, Hamaan is on his knees in front of Esther begging for mercy. But the king thinks Hamaan is putting the move on his wife. Hamaan doesn’t even have time to give an explanation before he is taken out to the very gallows that he built for Mordecai and strung up.

Mordecai gets Hamaan’s job. Esther gets a good night sleep. The fasting and praying people of Susa go out and have a big meal. And to this day, every year they celebrate. And we get a good lesson. And that is to never, never, never underestimate the power of an honest prayer.

And when you come into the presence of God, He lowers that scepter, because you are His bride, because you are His child. And He says, “*Ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door shall be open to you.*” And you then ask the greatest request that any Christian has ever asked. You skip all this stuff

about pay raises and Cadillacs and new houses, and you go right to the heart of it and you say, “Come, kingdom. Come. Make Your presence known in my house, in my heart, in my church, in my work. Come, kingdom. Don’t let my children grow without knowing of Your kingdom. Don’t let my work day pass without knowing of Your kingdom. Come, Kingdom.”

And all the while you’re praying, Satan, who was Hamaan, is starting to sneak out the side exit. And he begins to feel his collar getting tight. And he can anticipate that noose that’s beginning to tighten around his neck. Because that’s what happens when God’s people pray.

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