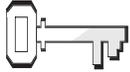


Challenging Choices



References

Esther 2:19–23;
3; 4; *Prophets and Kings*,
pp. 600, 601



Memory Verse

“People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).



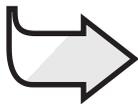
Objectives

The children will:

Know that all people are God’s people.

Feel a desire to accept all people regardless of culture, race, or religion.

Respond by accepting others.



The Message

God helps me accept everyone.

Monthly Theme

People are attracted to God through the lives of His people.

The Bible Lesson at a Glance

Mordecai overhears two of the king’s servants plotting to kill the king. He warns the king via Queen Esther. This act of service is noted in the king’s record books.

The king promotes Haman above all the nobles in the 127 provinces of his kingdom. Everyone bows to Haman except Mordecai. This angers Haman. In revenge he persuades the king to issue a decree to destroy all the Jews. When Mordecai hears this, he shares it with Esther, asking her to appeal to the king to save her people. Esther agrees, and asks Mordecai to have the Jews fast and pray for her for the next three days; then she will go before the king. Esther is willing to lay down her life for her people.

This is a lesson about service.

Mordecai and Esther served God and His people as they took the responsibility to appeal to the king to spare the Jews. We, too, can serve God and His people today by standing up for what is right in all circumstances.

Teacher Enrichment

“As a successful racial minority in the Persian empire, Esther’s people, the Jews, had not melted into their surroundings. Others were jealous of their success and separatism. A vengeful prime minister, Haman, . . . issued an edict of government-sponsored genocide.

“Would Queen Esther intervene? Doing so would risk her life. And what difference could she make? She was a powerless . . . partner to a king who strongly preferred women who never interfered with his wishes. . . . And yet she alone, of all the Jews, had access to the king.

“Esther’s cousin Mordecai reminded her of her unique place. . . . Esther responded with action. Her courageous words are a classic statement of heroism: ‘I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish’” (Introduction to the book of Esther, *The Student Bible* [Grand Rapids, Zondervan Corporation, 1986], p. 455).

Room Decorations

See Lesson 5.

Program Overview

Lesson Section	Minutes	Activities	Materials Needed
Welcome	ongoing	Greet students at door; hear pleased/troubled	none
1 Readiness Activities	up to 10	A. <i>Alike Yet Different</i> B. <i>Skin Deep</i>	none box or bag of mixed crayons in various stages of use: new, worn down, broken, fat ones, triangle ones, with and without the wrapper, plain and fancy ones
Any Time Prayer and Praise*	up to 10	Fellowship Songbook Mission Offering Prayer	none <i>Sing for Joy</i> <i>Children's Mission</i> none pretty piece of fabric from Lesson 5, paper, pencils, pins
2 Bible Lesson	up to 20	Experiencing the Story Memory Verse Bible Study	several large cardboard boxes, scroll, Bible-times costumes, black marker, chair, two crowns, two royal cloaks, adult male heart-shaped papers (see p. 142), Bible Bibles, paper, basket
3 Applying the Lesson	up to 15	A. <i>Learning to Accept</i> B. <i>Appreciating Differences</i>	none none
4 Sharing the Lesson	up to 15	<i>Community Project</i>	information about a community need in your area

***Prayer and Praise may be used at any time during the program.**

Welcome

Welcome students at the door. Ask how their week has been—what they are pleased/troubled about. Listen to last week’s memory verse and encourage the children to share any experiences from last week’s lesson study. Have them begin the Readiness Activity of your choice.



Readiness Activities

Select the activity most appropriate for your situation.

A. Alike Yet Different

Ask the children to stand. Then say:

Find a partner who has the same hair color.

Find a partner who dislikes the same vegetables you dislike.

Find a partner who has the same number of brothers and sisters.

After a while, ask the children to find partners who are *different* from themselves; for example:

Find a partner whose hair is a different color.

Find a partner with different colored eyes.

Find a partner wearing different colored clothes.

Find a partner who does not like to play the same games you like.

Debriefing

Ask: **Was it fun finding someone with the same likes and dislikes? What new things did you learn about your friends? Would it be fun if we were all alike? Why?**

God has made all of us different, yet He loves us all the same. He wants us to accept others even if their tastes and ideas are different from ours. The Bible tells us that “People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7). What does that mean? In our lesson today we will learn about someone who wanted everyone to behave in the same way. Today’s message is:



GOD HELPS ME ACCEPT EVERYONE.

Say that with me.

You Need:

- box or bag of mixed crayons in various stages of use: new, worn down, broken, fat ones, triangle ones, with and without the wrapper, plain and fancy ones

B. Skin-deep

Show the children a box of mixed crayons in various stages of use: new, worn down, broken, fat ones, triangle ones, with and without the wrapper, plain and fancy ones.

Debriefing

Ask: **How are the crayons different? How are they the same? Which ones do you like best? Did the color on the outside change how the crayon worked? These crayons are like people. We may look different, but we also have lots in common.**

God has made all of us different, yet He loves and accepts us all the same. The Bible says: "People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7). What does that mean? (He wants us to accept others even if their tastes and ideas are different from ours.) In our lesson today we will learn about someone who wanted everyone to behave in the same way. Today's message is:



GOD HELPS ME ACCEPT EVERYONE.

Say that with me.

Prayer and Praise **Any Time**



Fellowship

Report the students' joys and sorrows (pleased and troubled) as reported to you at the door (as appropriate). Allow time for sharing experiences from last week's lesson study and review last week's memory verse. Acknowledge any birthdays, special events, or achievements. Give a special warm greeting to all visitors.



Suggested Songs

- "Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 90)
- "Give Me Oil in My Lamp" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 132)
- "We Are His Hands" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 129)
- "I Will Make You Fishers of Men" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 135)
- "A Little Talk With Jesus" (*Sing for Joy*, no. 98)



Mission

Share a story from *Children's Mission*. Emphasize the theme of service.



Offering

Say: **God asks us to serve Him in many different ways. One way is by bringing our gifts. God is not interested in the amount of money that we give; He is interested in our willingness to give and to serve Him.**



Prayer

Continue to use the cloth hanging behind the throne (see Lesson 5). Encourage the children to write or draw their prayer requests and/or praise and pin them on the cloth. Select some of the requests at random and pray for them specifically.

You Need:

- cloth from Lesson 5
- small squares of paper
- pins
- pencils

Bible Lesson

You Need:

- several large cardboard boxes
- scroll
- Bible-times costumes
- black marker
- chair
- two crowns
- two royal cloaks
- adult male

Experiencing the Story

Characters: Mordecai (adult male), Haman, two men sitting at the gate, Hathach, Esther, King Xerxes. The other children can be Esther's servants and the crowd that bows down to Haman.

Setting the Scene

Create a simple wall by stacking and taping several large cardboard boxes together. Stand them about a door's width from the wall in front of the "palace." Cut a strip of cardboard about 12 inches (30 cms) deep and one yard (one meter) long to link the "stone wall" to the real wall. Paint the outline of stones on the boxes. Place a chair in the space between the cardboard wall and the real wall.

Have Mordecai tell the story. Encourage the children to act out the story as it is told.

"Mordecai" reads or tells the story.

My name is Mordecai. I adopted my cousin Esther when her parents died. Now she has been made queen. I am very proud of her, but I have told her not to tell anyone that she is Jewish. I go to the palace every day and wait for news to make sure that she is well. Now that she is queen, I cannot visit her.

I often sit in the gate. *[Mordecai moves over and sits in the gate.]* One day while I was sitting there, I overheard two guards talking about the king. *[Two guards talk angrily to each other.]* They were angry with him and were planning to kill him! When they had gone *[guards walk off]*, I called one of Esther's servants over. *[Beckon to a servant.]* I gave him a message for Queen Esther. Esther told the

king. King Xerxes investigated my report and discovered it was true. The guards were hung, and the story was written in the daily court record.

About this time King Xerxes made Haman second only to himself. *[Haman comes and begins to strut around.]* King Xerxes ordered that everyone should bow down to Haman when they saw him. So everyone did. *[Everyone bows to Haman as he goes past.]* However, I did not bow. I believe that I should bow only to God.

One day Haman noticed that I had not bowed down to him. He became very angry. *[Haman stomps about, looking angry.]* Haman knew I was a Jew, and he began to think about ways to destroy, not only me, but all the other Jews. *[Haman walks around looking thoughtful.]*

Every officer could ask the king for a favor. Haman lied to the king. He told him that some people were causing trouble. *[Haman "talks" to the king.]* He said he wanted them to be destroyed, and that he would pay money to people who did it. He didn't say that the people to be killed were Jews. So the king gave Haman an order to destroy those people, the Jews, and take their things.

When I heard the order, I put on rough clothes. *[Put on a rough robe.]* I covered myself with ashes and cried at the city gate. *[Sit crying in the gate.]* Esther's servants told her about me. *[Servants point to Mordecai and whisper to Esther.]* Esther sent some good clothes for me to wear, but I refused to put them on. *[Servant with clothing goes to Mordecai, who refuses it.]* Esther sent Hathach to talk to me. *[Two men talk.]* I told him everything and gave him a copy of the order for Esther to read. *[Mordecai gives Hathach a scroll.]* I told him to ask Esther to go to the king and beg for mercy.

Hathach gave Esther the message. *[Esther and Hathach talk, read the scroll, looking worried.]* Esther gave him a message for me. "Nobody may go to the king's throne room without being called. If anyone goes and the king holds out his gold scepter, that person may live. But if the king doesn't, that person dies. And I haven't been called to go to the king for 30 days."

I sent back a message: "Just because you live in the king's palace, don't think that people won't soon know you are a Jew. You can't escape. You might not say anything now. Then someone else will help save us. But you and the rest of our family will all die. And who knows, you may have been chosen to be queen to save us at this terrible time."

Esther sent me a final message. "Gather all the Jews in Susa together. Tell them not to eat or drink anything for three days and nights. My servant girls and I will do the same. Then, even though it's against the law, I will go to the king. And if I die, I die."

Next week we'll find out what happened.

Debriefing

Ask: **What would you have done if you had heard about the plot to kill the king?**

Do you think that Haman had any cause to be angry with Mordecai?

What would you have done when you heard the decree? How do you think Esther felt? How would you have reacted?

How should we behave toward people who are different from us? We are all different, but even so, we can still accept and serve others. Let's say today's message together:



GOD HELPS ME ACCEPT EVERYONE.

Memory Verse

The memory verse is: **"People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:7).**

In advance, prepare a set of memory verse hearts for each group of three to five children, by writing the words of the memory verse on heart-shaped papers (see page 142), one word on each heart. Mix the hearts in each set.

Give a set of hearts to each group of three to five children. (Small classes, make a set for each child.) Have the group (or child) use their Bibles to put the words in the right order. Repeat, mixing the hearts each time, until most of the children know the verse. Let the first group (or child) who knows the verse stand and say it. Then talk about the meaning of the text. Be sure the children understand what the text means.

Bible Study

Divide the children into small groups. Have an adult help nonreaders. Write each of the following questions on a separate piece of paper. Fold the papers and put them in a basket. Let the children pick one or more questions at random. Large group: have more than one copy of each question.

1. How did Haman feel when Mordecai did not kneel down and honor him? (Esther 2:5)
2. Did Mordecai disobey the king's command by not bowing down to Haman? (Esther 3:2) Explain your answer.
3. How did Haman find out that Mordecai was a Jew? (Esther 3:3, 4)
4. What did Haman decide to do to all the Jews? (Esther 3:6) Why? Was Haman fair? Explain your answer.
5. What did Mordecai do when he heard about the law Haman had persuaded the king to sign? (Esther 4:1)
6. Read Esther 4:12–14. What was Mordecai trying to tell Queen Esther? Why?

You Need:

- heart-shaped papers (see p. 142)
- Bible

You Need:

- Bibles
- paper
- basket

7. What was Queen Esther's reply to Mordecai when he asked her to talk to the king? (Esther 4:16) What does her reply tell us about Esther?

Allow time for each group to read their questions and answers for the group.

Debriefing

Allow response time as you ask: **Why do you think Mordecai was sure that God had placed Esther in the palace to protect the Jews? What do you think might have happened if Esther had said she was afraid and would not help?**

Does God still have special tasks for us to do?

How does God want us to treat those who are different from us? Is that always easy? Why?

What can we do that will help us understand and appreciate someone who is different from us? (Pray for the person, look for nice things about them or things we have in common.) **God is with us and will help us accept others. Let's say today's message:**



GOD HELPS ME ACCEPT EVERYONE.

3

Applying the Lesson

A. Learning to Accept

Say: **I would like you to listen to the following statements. If you agree, give me the "thumbs up" sign. If you disagree, give me the "thumbs down" sign. If you are not too sure, wiggle your thumb in the middle.** You may need to adapt the statements to meet your local situation. Read one at a time:

Jesus loves and accepts everyone no matter who they are.

People who come from another country are not as intelligent as we are.

People who have blue eyes are lazier than people with brown eyes.

People who have freckles get along better with others than people who do not have freckles.

A person's skin color does not

make them better or worse than anyone else.

Debriefing

Allow response time as you ask: **Why do we find it difficult to accept people who are different from us?** Encourage thoughtful responses. Accept their answers.

One reason is that we do not know the person very well. All we notice is our differences. Many times, when we get to know them, we find that they are really similar to us. It is only the outside that is different.

Should we dislike people because they are different? God wants us to accept all people regardless of culture, race, or religion. Let's say our message together:



GOD HELPS ME ACCEPT EVERYONE.

B. Appreciating Differences

Invite the children to sit in a circle. Say: **No two people here are alike. Everyone is different in some way. Do all of us wear our hair the same way? Are we all the same height and size? Would it be fun if we all looked the same? Why not?**

Let's appreciate our differences.

Begin by saying: **I am different from [child] because my hair is [color, style, texture]* and [child's] hair is [color, style, texture]. But Jesus loves both of us the same, and I am happy that [child] is my friend.**

Have the child you named continue this activity by saying, **I am different from [choose a child] because I am a boy and she is a girl, but Jesus loves both of us the same, and I am happy that [child's name] is my friend.**

* Encourage children to choose the difference most appropriate to your class. Differences exist in color, brown versus red, etc.; in style, ponytail versus loose, etc.; and in texture, straight versus curly.

Continue until all the children have acknowledged that they accept and care about each other as friends, regardless of their differences.

Debriefing

Ask: **How do you feel knowing that your friends like and accept you regardless of your differences?**

How can we help others experience the same feeling of joy and acceptance?

God made each of us special. We are all different, but we are all God's children. Let's say today's message together:



GOD HELPS ME ACCEPT EVERYONE.

4

Sharing the Lesson

Community Project

Identify a community need in your area. If possible, invite someone in to talk about it. It should be a project where it is possible to do something practical, such as collect and distribute food, or help elderly people with yard work, etc.

Say: **One way of getting to know others is by doing something for them.** Explain about the need. Divide the children into small groups and ask each group to come up with ways to help meet a specific need.

Debriefing

Ask the children to share their ideas. Help them coordinate activities.

Say: **Even though we have not met**

these people, how do you feel about them now that you know a little more about their needs?

We are all different and have different needs. God helps us to accept everyone. He will help us as we help others.

Discuss and make specific plans to help someone or a group in your community. Be prepared to help as needed.

Let's say our message together:



GOD HELPS ME ACCEPT EVERYONE.

Closing

Gather the children in a circle. Say a prayer, asking God to bless the plans laid and to help you and the children to love and accept all people.

You Need:

- a community need in your area

Challenging Choices

References

Esther 2:19–23; 3; 4; *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 600, 601

Memory Verse

“People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart”
(1 Samuel 16:7, NIV).

The Message

God helps me accept everyone.

Have you ever been in a situation in which you did not know what to do? Queen Esther was. Read on to find out what she did.

Mordecai was happy that Esther became queen. But he still did not want her to tell others that she was a Jew.

One day when he was sitting at the palace gate, Mordecai heard two guards talking. They were angry with the king and were planning to kill him! Mordecai told Esther, who told the king. King Xerxes investigated Mordecai’s report. It was true! The guards were arrested and hanged. All of this was written in the daily court record.

About the same time, King Xerxes made Haman his second in command. King Xerxes ordered that everyone should bow down to Haman when they saw him. And everyone did, except Mordecai. One day Haman noticed that Mordecai did not bow to him. He became very angry. Haman knew Mordecai was a Jew. He began thinking about ways to destroy Mordecai—and all other Jews.

Haman decided to tell the king that

a certain group of people were causing trouble, and that they should be destroyed. He said he would pay the people who destroyed them. He did not tell the king that the people were Jews.

“Keep the money,” the king said to Haman. “And do with the people as you please.” (See Esther 3:11.)

When Mordecai heard the order, he put on rough clothes. He covered himself with ashes and cried at the city gate. Esther’s servants told her how Mordecai was dressed. She sent good clothes for him to wear, but he refused to put them on.

Esther sent Hathach, her servant, to talk to Mordecai. Mordecai told him everything that had happened. He gave Hathach a copy of the order for Esther. Mordecai told him to ask Esther to go to the king and beg for mercy. Hathach hurried to give Esther the message.

Esther sent a message back to Mordecai. “Nobody may go to the king’s throne room without being called. If anyone goes and the king holds out his gold scepter, that person may live. But if the king doesn’t, that person dies. And I haven’t been called to go to the king for 30 days.”

Mordecai answered, “Just because you live in the king’s palace, don’t think that people won’t soon know you are a Jew. You can’t escape. If you remain silent, help will come another way. But you and the rest of our family will all die. And who knows, you may have been chosen to be queen to save us at this terrible time.”

Esther sent one final message to Mordecai, “Get all the Jews in Susa together. Tell them not to eat or drink anything for three days and nights. My servants and I will do the same. Then, even though it’s against the law, I will go to the king. And if I die, I die.”

What will happen to Esther? Will she die? We will learn more next week.



Daily Activities

Sabbath

- If possible, go for a walk with your family.
- How many different types of flowers and trees can you see?
- Find a quiet place and read the lesson story together.
- Thank God for all the different things that He has made.

Sunday

- Cut out a heart and write your memory verse on it. Hang it where you can see it. During worship today, teach the memory verse to your family.
- Make a list of family differences (color of people's eyes, hair, shoe size, and height). Write a poem about differences and share it with your family.
- Thank God for your family.

Monday

- During worship today, find out as much as you can about gates to cities in Bible times.
- Ask an adult to help you find another Old Testament story where someone was sitting at the city gate. Why did cities have gates?
- Draw a picture of a modern gate and what the gate to Xerxes' palace may have looked like.
- Thank God for His protection.

Tuesday

- With your family, look up Acts 10:34, 35. Who in the New Testament had to learn to accept people even though they were different? If you have difficulty in accepting someone, ask Jesus to help you accept them now.
- Think of a tune or make up a tune so you can sing the memory verse.
- If possible, plan to visit a maze this week. Or make a maze for your family. A maze is difficult because everything looks the same.

Wednesday

- Read and discuss Esther 2:21–23 during family worship. Mordecai overheard two guards plotting to kill the king. Who guards your country's leader?
- Sit in a circle. Whisper something to the person next to you and have them whisper it to the next person. Go around the circle. Was the message the same when it came back to you?
- What should you do if you hear two friends talking about someone else? Review your memory verse.
- Ask Jesus to help you to listen only to good things about others.

Thursday

- In Esther's time laws were made by the king. How are laws made where you live?
- During worship, ask: What special laws did God give us? Read Exodus 20 together. Discuss: Why did God give us laws? How do they make us happy?
- Mordecai could not meet with Esther when she became queen. How many different ways could they have sent messages to each other?
- What ways can you communicate with a friend who lives in another part of town?
- Thank God for all the ways we can communicate, and that He is only a prayer away.

Friday

- For family worship today, act out the lesson story. Include Mordecai at the gate, Haman going to the king, and Esther and Mordecai's reaction when they learn of the decree.
- Say your memory verse song together.
- Discuss ways your family cares about one another.
- Thank God for your family.