

5

STAND UP AND SPEAK



How would you describe your experiences with public speaking?

QUESTION #1

Be bold, but leave the results to God.



THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

Believe it or not, about ten percent of us actually look forward to public speaking. At the other end of the spectrum, about ten percent of us dread it to the point of great anxiety. The eighty percent of us left in the middle would rather not speak in public, but we'll do it if we have to.¹

It's one thing when you're called on in a meeting to answer a question or give a brief report; we don't have time to get nervous. But if our boss tells us that we must make a major presentation in three weeks, we have plenty of time to think about it—and thinking about it makes us nervous!

That nervousness is greatly multiplied when what we say carries significant consequences.

Boldness in speaking does not come easy. Courage to do the right thing in a risky situation does not come easy either. Yet in Esther, we see a woman who did both. Lives were at stake. If she didn't speak and act boldly, thousands could die, but if she acted courageously yet blundered it—well, she could make matters worse.

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE SAY?

Esther 7:1-6

¹ So the king and Haman went in to feast with Queen Esther. ² And on the second day, as they were drinking wine after the feast, the king again said to Esther, “What is your wish, Queen Esther? It shall be granted you. And what is your request? Even to the half of my kingdom, it shall be fulfilled.” ³ Then Queen Esther answered, “If I have found favor in your sight, O king, and if it please the king, let my life be granted me for my wish, and my people for my request. ⁴ For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have been silent, for our affliction is not to be compared with the loss to the king.” ⁵ Then King Ahasuerus said to Queen Esther, “Who is he, and where is he, who has dared to do this?” ⁶ And Esther said, “A foe and enemy! This wicked Haman!” Then Haman was terrified before the king and the queen.

The events of the last few days all came down to this moment, this ultimate act of courage. It was time to expose all, and Esther did just that, revealing both her Jewish identity and Haman’s evil plans. She appealed to the king to act, even as she had prayed, fasted, and appealed to God to act.

God already had been at work. The night before, King Ahasuerus had spent a sleepless night. Surely this was not mere coincidence, but insomnia brought about by God. In that moment of sleeplessness, the king had daily reports read to him and he heard of Mordecai’s unheralded acts of heroism. (See Esth. 6:1-3.) Perhaps shamed by his failure to properly reward Mordecai, the king instructed Haman to honor Mordecai—the very person Haman despised! (See vv. 4-11.)

Now at the banquet, the king learned that both his wife and the man he had just honored were scheduled to die—and the man at the table was the one who had manipulated him into devising the scheme.

What do you find interesting about Esther’s overall handling of this situation?

QUESTION #2

Haman had been exposed, and he “was terrified.” The word used to describe Haman’s reaction was normally used in the Old Testament for the fear and trembling people experienced at a divine encounter. (See 1 Chron. 21:30; Dan. 8:17.) Haman knew he had just angered the most powerful man in the world—and he rightly trembled in fear.

Esther exposed this dark deed with great boldness, but she also did it with wisdom.

1. Esther didn’t point the finger of blame at the king, though King Ahasuerus had unwittingly signed her death warrant. She appealed both to his innocence and his self-interest. In verse 4, Esther implied that the destruction of the Jews would mean wiping out a part of the work force and economy, spelling great financial loss for the king.
2. Esther spoke on behalf of others. She didn’t simply advocate for her own life, she spoke up for all her people. Esther entered into the suffering of her people.

Esther could have caved to fear in that moment. She could have simply kept silent, turning a blind eye to the injustices in Persia against the Jewish people. But she used the opportunity before her to give a voice to her people. In the process, she gave us a great example of living out Paul’s words: “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Eph. 5:11).

Christians also have opportunities to speak up against injustice. We may not have a royal title, but we all have voices. Some people may choose to disregard the injustices around them. Others may want to appear especially spiritual, focused only on sharing the gospel and getting people to heaven. *“I don’t get involved in these issues. I just preach the gospel.”* But God calls us to look out for others.

We have times we are to pray and act. We find times we are to lend our voices in speaking up for those who are too often neglected: the unborn, the immigrant, the minority, or the underprivileged. We can be a voice to advocate for the most vulnerable among us.

What are some fears that often hinder us from speaking out against the darkness around us?

QUESTION #3

WHERE CAN I SPEAK OUT?

Circle one of the areas of injustice below and begin crafting a personal or group plan to speak out and make a difference.

Poverty

Racism

Sex trafficking

Abortion

Homelessness

Substance abuse

Domestic abuse

Gambling

Pornography

How would you define the problem?

What solutions currently exist?

What gaps remain in solving the problem?

Where can you best engage to make a difference?

"Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them."

—EPHESIANS 5:11

Esther 7:7-10

⁷ And the king arose in his wrath from the wine-drinking and went into the palace garden, but Haman stayed to beg for his life from Queen Esther, for he saw that harm was determined against him by the king. ⁸ And the king returned from the palace garden to the place where they were drinking wine, as Haman was falling on the couch where Esther was. And the king said, "Will he even assault the queen in my presence, in my own house?" As the word left the mouth of the king, they covered Haman's face. ⁹ Then Harbona, one of the eunuchs in attendance on the king, said, "Moreover, the gallows that Haman has prepared for Mordecai, whose word saved the king, is standing at Haman's house, fifty cubits high." And the king said, "Hang him on that." ¹⁰ So they hanged Haman on the gallows that he had prepared for Mordecai. Then the wrath of the king abated.

Now that Esther had planned, prayed, fasted, and finally spoken up, what was next? She could do nothing but wait. But she wouldn't have to wait long!

History records that King Ahasuerus was well-known for his temper. At times, he could be an unstable and vindictive decision-maker. Consider how easily he tossed out Queen Vashti because she refused to be paraded in front of others (see 1:10-21), and how haphazardly he signed onto Haman's genocide plan. (See 3:7-14.) That's the kind of person you do not want to upset, and in this moment, the king's anger surfaced.

Let's not assume the king immediately knew what to do. We've all had those moments when anger clouded our thoughts. Perhaps that's why the king left: he needed to get away from the man who angered him so that he could clear his thoughts. He had to make a decision nobody else could make for him. His advisors were all bereft of wisdom—and he couldn't ask Haman, since he was the problem!



Although the king had no human advisors to lean on, the sovereign Lord of the universe was not absent on that day. "In the LORD's hand the king's heart is a stream of water that he channels toward all who please him" (Prov. 21:1). King Ahasuerus had a history of rash decisions, but in this moment, he made the right choice. He put this enemy of the people to death, and soon he would empower the Jews to stand against those who sought to harm them.

Now that he had been exposed, Haman rightfully feared vengeance. In desperation, he literally threw himself on the mercy of the queen. How ironic that Haman brought all this on himself because a Jew would not bow before him, yet he now fell before a Jew. The irony continued in that the gallows Haman built to kill his enemy was used to kill him.

Seeing people who are hurt, abused, or taken advantage of pulls at our hearts. We want to see the wrong righted, punishment delivered, and justice served. We do what we can on behalf of others, but we must leave any vengeance in the hands of God.

God's justice will come—and not just against the Hamans in this world. In reality we are all like Haman; at our core, we are dead in our sins and given to the temptations of power, lust, and greed. We are not the good and noble people we think we are. We are all sinful people deserving death. (See Rom. 6:23.)

Like Haman, we can prostrate ourselves before our King, begging for mercy for our sins and crimes committed against Him. But unlike Haman, we have Someone who was willing to stand in our place and face the judgment for us. Jesus went to the cross so that we could receive the mercy of God. What's more, by His resurrection, Jesus defeated the corruption that infects human hearts. As a result, we have life!

What are the practical consequences of leaving vengeance in God's hands?

QUESTION #4

Where do we have opportunities to be bold about justice in our community?

QUESTION #5

LIVE IT OUT

What steps will you take to stand up for others? Choose one of the following applications:

- ▶ **Pray.** Ask the Lord to reveal ways you can use what He's given you—your time, possessions, influence, and position—to speak out against evil and injustice in society.
- ▶ **Look.** Do some research into opportunities in your community to help fight injustice.
- ▶ **Act.** As a group, prayerfully consider what you can do either through your local church or a trusted local organization to help make a difference in the area God is calling you to serve.

You may not be a skilled public speaker, but all of us have been given a voice that God wants us to use to be salt and light in this world. Be bold, but leave the results to God!

My thoughts



1. Nick Morgan, "Why We Fear Public Speaking and How to Overcome It," *Forbes*, March 30, 2011, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/nickmorgan/2011/03/30/why-we-fear-public-speaking-and-how-to-overcome-it/#32c779f7460b>.