

Liberation Approach

by Tess Frohock, Andrew Mochrie, Randy Knighten

For Such a Time as This: Knowing Your Time and Responding with Courage “The Walk of Privilege”

Summary

The story of Esther grants us liberating theological reflection. It questions the status quo and does not accept a negative event as fate or an accident of history. Esther is a story of commitment to a liberating God. This lesson seeks to help students understand the systems of privilege and oppression in the world and just as Esther, realize God’s call for them to challenge these systems in the name of justice.

Introduction

In our society teenagers are often seen as less capable of leading in a capacity that makes an impact in the lives of others. We are slow to trust teens with anything other than school work, part time jobs, and chores around the household. Many teens live without recognizing and understanding the systems of privilege and oppression around them. Students are convinced that they are only called to what is easy, convenient, and takes little courage, as opposed to what is potentially risky, untimely, and requires significant degrees of courage to accomplish. On the other hand, God calls all of us to do more with our lives than just what is easy, safe, and normal in order to make an impact for God’s Kingdom. Esther could have chosen comfort, normal, and easy over the risky and impactful call to plead on the behalf of the Jews at a time not on the Kings schedule. Instead in courage she chose the latter and allowed for an entire people to be spared from destruction. Teenagers have the capacity and courage to respond to God’s call to serve and fight for injustice in such a way that liberates God’s people and makes a significant impact for God’s Kingdom on the world around them.

Approach

In this lesson we will be using the Liberation Approach. The Scripture passage, main activity, group discussion, and prayer will engage youth in critical reflection and dialogue that lead them toward action that relieves oppression. The lesson, in dialogue with biblical faith, brings about questions that rise out of reality. These questions then lead to a protest against oppression and injustice and a struggle for liberation and justice.

The Context

This lesson is best suited for a group of diverse high school students from various churches. However, the lesson can be done in many youth ministries. The lesson should be done with anywhere between five and 20 participants in high school between the ages of 15 and 18, both male and female. You will want an open classroom with a good amount of space (no chairs). This exercise and the room in which it is being held are considered a safe environment; therefore, you want to make sure you are in a space where people are not walking by or walking in and out. There should be as little distraction as possible. The room should be quiet and comfortable.

You will need a line of masking tape on the floor down the center of the room. You will also need audio/visual equipment for this lesson (PowerPoint lesson and prayer) which will need to be in front for the students to see.

This lesson is applicable to all socio-economic and racial backgrounds.

Liberation Approach

Theological Exploration

When exploring the theology of Esther there are three important issues to consider. First, we see the importance of race and sex in theology. The story challenges us as theologians to take seriously both racism and sexism. In the story Jews are condemned to death because they are of a different ethnicity. The story also highlights the dignity and strength of women.

Secondly, the story reminds us of the history of Jewish oppression throughout the land of Israel, calling to mind the dilemma of other innocent victims all over the world and the justice God demands for the oppressed.

Lastly, what is most interesting about the book of Esther is that God's name is not mentioned once in the book's entirety. Still it can be seen that God orchestrated the events that occur concerning God's covenant people, the Jews. One of the main ways God arranged these events was through Queen Esther. Esther was a Jewish woman in a Persian kingdom who became queen. Because of her position in that time and place in history she was able to act in such a way that none other could on behalf of the Jewish people. The story challenges us to think of God as a verb and not just as a noun, ultimately reminding us we are called to a specific time and place in history to be living instruments of God's grace in the world around us.

Learning Goals

Upon completing this lesson, students will:

- Know the story of Esther
- Begin to recognize the systems of privilege and oppression in the world
- Know God calls them to challenge these systems in the name of justice.

Scripture References

- [Esther 1-7](#)
- [Esther 4:14b](#) (NRSV) "And who knows but that you have come to royal position for such a time as this."
- [1 John 3:10](#)

Exegetical Summary

Esther's story is a great example of responding to God's call in God's time and on God's terms through courage and faith. Though God's name is not mentioned in the book, God's hand can be seen throughout the book's entirety.

At this point in time in the story of Esther, Haman the Agagite had convinced King Ahasuerus to issue a decree for the destruction of the Jewish people. On hearing this a Jewish man Mordecai, the guardian of Esther, was grieved and mourned with sackcloth in front of the King's gate.

This is when Esther becomes a major player. She finds out that Mordecai was grieved and wanted to find out why. She sent Hathach, her messenger, to get the details of his situation. Mordecai told him and sent him back with a charge to Esther to plead to the king on behalf of the Jewish people.

Esther was worried about this because you need to have special permission and timing to have court with the King. When this word got back to Mordecai he was not pleased and told her that her fate would be the same as all other Jews if she didn't act.

His final word to her that convinced her to do this was "...who knows whether you have not come to the kingdom for such a time as this." From there Esther had asked them to fast as she would do the same with them and get the ball rolling on the effort to end the decree to destroy the Jewish people.

Liberation Approach

Preparing for the Lesson

The facilitator should review the following items before implementing the lesson:

- The teacher and small group leaders should read the story of Esther, Chapters 1-7 and be familiar with the context of the story. Also, use the Theological Exploration and Exegetical Summary, sections of this lesson. All of this will help you have a better understanding of the text and the purpose of this lesson.
- You will need a room that is large enough for all students who are participating in this workshop to stand in a single file line, shoulder to shoulder.
- You should lay masking tape in the middle of the room so there is equal distance to the front and to the back.
- Students do not need to have done anything in preparation for this lesson.
- Gather all necessary materials:
 - Masking tape
 - Laptop, projector, and screen or DVD player and TV.
 - Several copies of the lesson for leaders.
 - PowerPoint for story of Esther and closing prayer

Lesson Activity

Opening/Gathering (5 minutes):

The Story of Esther

Read aloud: *Before we begin our activity today I want to tell a story from the Old Testament about a queen named Esther.*

Esther is beautiful and finds favor in the eyes of the king, so he takes her to be his queen. Esther's cousin, Mordecai, warns Esther not to tell the king she is Jewish because he

fears she may be mistreated, so she obeys him.

The prime minister of the king, Haman, commands all of the royal officials to bow to him but Esther's cousin Mordecai refuses. Haman is so angry that he is determined to kill Mordecai and all people of Jewish ethnicity. Through bribery and lies he convinces the king to issue an edict that all of the Jews in the empire will be killed.

Mordecai finds out about Haman's plan to kill all of the Jews and asks Esther to appeal to the king to spare the Jews.

Esther is afraid to go to the king because she knows that if she approaches the king in his inner court without being summoned she may be put to death. Mordecai convinces Esther that she has been called to her high position as queen for this purpose: "for such a time as this" (4:14) to save her family and all of the Jews.

After her conversation with Mordecai, Esther orders him to gather all of the Jews to fast for three days on her behalf. She decides to approach the king to try to save her people. Esther reveals Haman's evil plot to the king and pleads with the king to spare the lives of all of the Jews. The Jews are saved because of Esther knowing her time and responding with courage.

Liberation Approach

Go through PowerPoint summary

Engaging/Exploring (15 minutes):

The Walk of Privilege:

- The students should stand behind the line, so when the sentences are read aloud, the students will walk forward to go over the line for the privilege walk, or stay behind the line and take steps back on the privilege walk. Each step depends on the participants' responses to the sentences that are read aloud by the facilitator.
- All students should begin this exercise silently without speaking, hand in hand, in a single file line, shoulder to shoulder.
- Once everyone is silent in line read the following statement:
- **Read aloud:** *We are about to do an activity on diversity and privilege. Just like in the story of Esther, people and groups of people today experience privilege or they are treated poorly because of their race, ethnicity, gender, socio-economic status—because of who they are or where they come from. Please listen carefully to each sentence I read and take the step required if it applies to you. This activity is not a competition but if it were, the prize would be at the front of the room. If you do not feel comfortable moving during the activity, you have the right to stay where you are. This activity and the room it is being held in are a safe environment. Please remain silent throughout the entire activity.*
- Ask the questions in the attachment entitled “Walk of Privilege.”

Debriefing Questions:

1. Ask participants to remain in their positions and to look at their position

in relation to the line and the positions of the other participants.

2. Go around the room and have each student share one word that captures how they are feeling right now. If they do not want to share, have them say, “pass”.
3. What happened in this activity?
4. How did it feel to be one of the students on the “back” side of the line?
5. How did it feel to be one of the students on the “front” side of the line?
6. Were there certain sentences that were more impactful than others?

Responding/Committing (15 minutes):

Connecting Esther with “The Walk of Privilege”

Have students get into groups of two or three people sitting close to them. Guide them through the following points¹ and questions:

In the story of Esther we find three things that gave Esther the courage to save the Jews:

1. **Esther remembered her roots**—she remembered that before she was the king's wife, she was the daughter of Mordecai's uncle. She acted out of family love. She remembers she was a Jew before a queen.
 - i. Question: How difficult is it for you to remember who you really are and where you come from when times get tough? Do you ever deny yourself because you are ashamed of your past or because you want to win the acceptance of certain people?

¹ The three points come from an article by Orlando E. Costas entitled “The Subversiveness of Faith: Esther as a Paradigm for a Liberating Theology.”

Liberation Approach

2. **Esther remembered her calling**—her vocation was not simply to be a queen and enjoy the privileges of royal life; it was an opportunity given to her to serve her people in a moment of crisis.
 - ii. Question: The calling of the people of God is to be one of service rather than of survival or achieving personal success. What are some things you learned from “The Walk of Privilege” that can help you focus on serving others rather than achieving wealth and power?

3. **Esther remembered God**—she remembered she belonged to God. Even though the book of Esther never mentions God’s name the book shows us that commitment and loyalty to God is best demonstrated by following the path of justice. 1 John 3:10 says whoever does not do justice is not of God.
 - iii. Question: If true faith in God means doing what is right and just in God’s sight, Jesus was the ultimate example of that faith. What are some ways Jesus challenged systems of oppression and privilege during his ministry on earth? How can you do the same?

Closing/Departing (3 minutes):

The Lord’s Prayer: Liberation Style

Ask everyone to go back and stand on the line and hold hands.

Read aloud: *Let us pray together the following Latin paraphrase of The Lord’s Prayer from the screen as we close our time together and prepare for service to the world beyond these walls.*

*Our Father and Mother
who is in us here on earth,
holy is your name
in the hungry
who share their bread and their song.*

*Your Kingdom come,
which is a generous land
flowing with milk and honey.
Let us do your will,
standing up when all are sitting down,
and raising our voice
when all are silent.*

*You are giving us our daily bread
in the song of the bird and the miracle of the
corn.*

*Forgive us
for keeping silent in the face of injustice,
and for burying our dreams;
for not sharing bread and wine,
love and the land,
among us, now.*

*Don't let us fall into the temptation
of shutting the door through fear,
of resigning ourselves to hunger and injustice,
of taking up the same arms as the enemy.
But deliver us from evil.
Give us the perseverance and the solidarity
to look for love,
even if the path has not yet been trodden,
even if we fail;*

*so we shall have known your Kingdom
which is being built forever and ever.
Amen.*

Liberation Approach

Reflection and Evaluation

When the lesson is complete, the facilitator should reflect on the following questions in order to evaluate the success of the lesson:

- Do you feel that the learning goals of the lesson were accomplished?
- How did the students reflect and discuss after “The Walk of Privilege”? Did they understand what happened?
- Do you feel that the students left knowing:
 1. the story of liberation in Esther,
 2. more about the systems of oppression in the world, and
 3. that God calls them to help liberate?
- If so, what seemed to reiterate those ideas? If not, what could have helped solidify those key concepts?