**Week 4 – Courageous Women**

**Bible Reading: Esther 7:1-4**

***Testimony subject – Courageous and inspirational women that God has placed in your life***

**Introduction**

In this series of being courageous, how fitting it is that on Mother’s Day we speak about courageous women. Throughout the Bible there are stories of strong and courageous women. For example …

* Mary and the courage she needed to fulfil God’s plan – an unmarried pregnant girl could be stoned to death by the laws at that time.
* Miriam was brave to watch over baby Moses and then to intervene when Pharoah’s daughter found him. She courageously looked after Moses in a time when baby boys were being murdered.
* Ruth bravely accompanied her mother-in-law to a place where she was a foreigner without money or means to live.
* The Salvation Army has so many amazing stories of women who pioneered the work of corps in our territory and around the world. (It was courageous women who took The Salvation Army to the USA.)
* Very many mothers have been courageous and fought for their children, whether they gave birth to them or not, teaching them, providing for them, guiding them often sacrificially.

**The Esther Story**

* Esther was an orphan brought up by her uncle. She was Jewish and part of a Jewish community that were not welcome in Susa. Some politicians at the time were suggesting ethnic cleansing and the annihilation of the entire Jewish race in that kingdom.
* The king was unpredictable and impulsive, and got rid of his Queen Vashti and ordered that an alternative be found! Esther was beautiful and was chosen to be one of the king’s queens, though she kept her racial identity secret at first.
* Then the most senior of advisers to the king persuaded him to agree to the destruction of all Jewish people.
* Esther was the only one close enough who could try to reason with the king and make him change his mind. She agreed to speak to the king, though she remembered Vashti and was very aware of her precarious position. If he had not been pleased with her request she, and all her people, could be killed.

**When you know you have to do something for God**

* History is made up of people who were willing to do something that took great courage, that meant personal risk, opposition and being misunderstood.
* God has called people to step out and step up and face issues and speak out for him. We do it, not just because God has asked us, but also because he promised that he will provide the Holy Spirit to guide us and to give us the words that he needs us to say.
* When God wants you to do something and speak into your life, whether it’s an instant realisation or a growing awareness, it is important we are open to listening to and trusting in him.
* You can bury the thought, ignore it and do nothing, and hope that God will find someone else. But God, who knows you and what you are capable of, may ask you to speak out or speak up or stand for something or speak against an injustice, and he knows you can do it with his strength.

**The end of the story**

* Esther carefully planned her way of speaking out for her people. It involved two elaborate banquets. Eventually she knew the time was rightto speak to the king.
* The king realised things he had not been fully aware of before. He saved the Jewish people, and in memory of that event Jews today celebrate *Purim.*
* God is not even mentioned in this story. But he is putting people in the right place to accomplish his will.
* In God’s timing, his plan for our lives is revealed. He places us in the right place to accomplish his will, and when that happens God uses us for his purposes.
* This story is significant because God chooses a courageous woman to act for him. Even in our day there is a need for women to stand up and speak out on the Lord’s behalf. You may wish to explore this further in your local context.

**Application and response**

* When we accept Jesus into our lives we are repurposed. God takes the invitation we make for him to come and dwell within us and be available to him.
* Now, what is his purpose for you? Where has he placed you to represent him?What does he need you to do for him in that place?
* It is not by chance that you are where you are; it is by God’s appointment. And if you don’t know what it is he desires from you, then ask him! It is a truth for all of us that there are no passengers in God’s Kingdom – we are all representatives.
* How willing are you to stand up for him and do his work?