

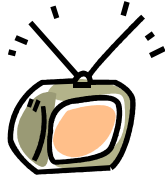


Doing a One-Eighty

WEEK 3

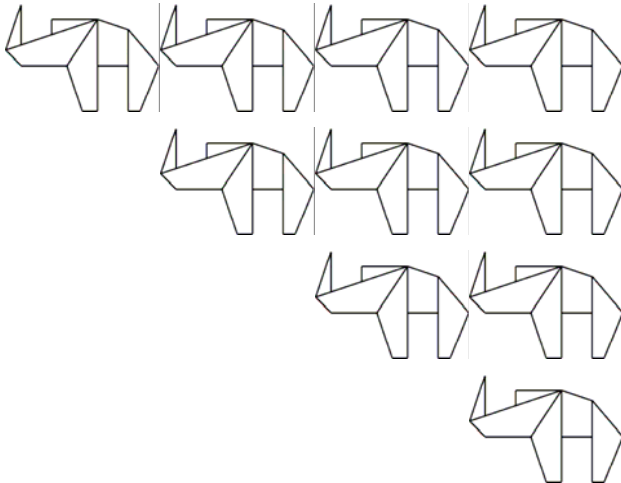
Esther 2 – 4

Shuffle the Deck



1) Imagine there's a TV screen on your forehead broadcasting your inner thoughts at this moment. What would viewers see? Draw, collage or write about it.

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2) Fold a piece of scrap paper into an airplane
<http://www.paperairplanes.co.uk/peteplan.html>;
<http://www.paperairplanes.co.uk/heliplan.html>,

a “cootie catcher”

<http://www.funorama.com/images/1zinst.gif>

a snowflake

<http://www.highhopes.com/snowflakes.html>,

or another non-traditional paper shape. Origami:

http://dev.origami.com/images_pdf/baby_elephant.pdf

http://dev.origami.com/images_pdf/butterfly_weber.pdf

Write your next grocery list on it. Or a note to a friend.
Or your favorite Bible Verse.

Deal the Cards

“Flip-flop!”

If you paid attention during the last U.S. presidential election, you heard this expression a lot. And it was no compliment.

But no matter what you think of American politics, flip-flops are sometimes good. Sure, it's ugly for a person to change his or her mind all the time. But still—four times in the Old Testament we read that God Himself “changed His mind.” ([Exodus 32:14](#), [Jeremiah 26:19](#), [Amos 7:3](#) and [Amos 7:6](#)) And...well...whew! If He hadn't, a whole lotta people would've been road pizza.

Another kind of flip-flop can be good, too—the circumstantial kind. We see lots of these in Esther's story. A queen gets deposed and an orphan replaces her. An in-the-closet man hiding his



Jewish identity ends up becoming the spokesperson for Israel's people. A nation threatened with destruction through an evil edict ultimately triumphs over its enemies.

God is the God of great reversals. Big turn-arounds. Flip-flops! Nothing is impossible for Him. Despite Haman's best efforts, Esther's story doesn't end with Mordecai facing the gallows. It ends instead with a celebration that still gets commemorated year after year.

Are you standing in need of a big reversal?

What pain are you or a loved one facing that you long to see flip-flopped? What sort of one-eighty would thrill your heart and bring glory to God?

"All things work together for good." Sometimes people quote us this verse from [Romans 8](#) in the midst of our pain, and it hurts. But let's not lose sight of its amazing truth. God promises to work all our difficulties together for good. *All* of them! Every single solitary last one of them.

That doesn't mean it's good that weather destroyed a home or a girl got raped or a husband abandoned his family. The trials themselves aren't good. What's good is God's ability to miraculously take pain and suffering and work them all together for good.

Think about it: A drop-dead gorgeous girl sleeps with a pagan king and God uses her lousy choice to save millions. That's a *big* God! And if Esther's compromises didn't thwart His purposes, neither can our sin.

Isn't that a comfort?

What sins and mistakes and heartaches do you have to offer Him? Turn them all over—the whole package. Every broken piece. Every stupid thing you have ever done; every hurt someone has ever done to you. Every painful circumstance in your life and in the lives of those you love. Ask Him to redeem them—to take what was intended as evil and use it instead for good.

Ask Him to work a mighty, first-rate grand reversalizing flip-flop.

God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth can do it!

Monday: Pompous Circumstance

1. Read [Esther 2:11–4:9](#).
2. Using your sanctified imagination, describe ...
 - How Mordecai must have felt when Haman demanded that he bow.



- How Haman must have felt when Cousin Mordecai wouldn't bow.

3. What evidence do we have of Haman's feelings?

Tuesday: *Bad Couple of the Bible*

If someone were to ask me to name some bad couples in the Bible, I'd immediately think of [Adam and Eve](#) or [Ananias and Sapphira](#). But Xerxes and Esther easily qualify, too:

1. Reread [Ether 2:11-19](#).
2. What was involved in Esther's preparation for her night with the king?
3. What was his response to her?
4. Read [Esther 2:19](#). What does the creation of a second group of virgins tell you about the king and his relationship with Esther?
5. After considering today's reading, interact with this statement: If you disobey God, He can't use you.

Wednesday: *Tip-off Time*

1. Read [Esther 2:21-3:15](#).
2. How does Mordecai stick his neck out?
3. If you were Mordecai, what might you expect to happen after you save the king's life?



4. What actually happens after Mordecai saves the king's life? How do you think Mordecai felt about such events?

5. Knowing how the story turns out, you can surely imagine possible reasons why God allowed Mordecai to go unrewarded. List possibilities:

6. Describe a time in your own life or in the life of someone you know about when good behavior went unrewarded or in which reward was greatly delayed.

Thursday: *When It Looks Like Hope is Lost*

1. Read [Esther 3:7](#). The text says Haman cast “pur.” In Texas we eat black-eyed peas and watch the Tournament of Roses parade on New Year's Day. But in the Ancient Near East, people made their plans for the new year by casting lots, or purim. (Esther's story is celebrated annually as the Feast of Purim.) The word “pur” occurs in the Bible only one time—here—and it differs from the usual word for “lot.” Its source may be the Akkadian word for “stone.” Perhaps the people took stones with different markings and threw them, determining the date for an event by how the rocks landed. Or maybe they threw stones on a marked surface, similar to throwing darts at a calendar.

2. The outcome of Haman's little lot-throwing escapade was that the date was set for a full twelve months away. What does this suggest about God's sovereignty?

3. What excuse did Haman give for justifying genocide ([3:8](#))? Was there any truth to his words?

4. What did the edict say ([3:13](#))?



5. What was the response to the edict on the part of Mordecai and the Jewish people ([4:1-3](#))?
6. List terrible circumstances in your world today that seem outside of God's control. Spend some time asking Him to work behind the scenes in your life, your church, your nation, worldwide.

Friday: *Things Aren't Always As They Appear*

1. Reread [Esther 4:1-9](#).
2. What does Mordecai do when he hears about the edict ([4:1](#))?
3. In Esther's day once a woman became queen, she had to stop ongoing contact with men. In fact the only men with whom she could have regular interaction would have been eunuchs, so there would be no question about the parentage of any child conceived. Being kept from fertile males kept the queen safe from rape as well as guaranteeing that no pretender to the throne happened along. Because of her lack of access to Mordecai, when and how did Esther finally learn about Haman's plot?
4. According to [4:8](#), what does Mordecai expect Esther to do with the news?
5. Imagine yourself transported back in time. Leave behind the present-day image of marriage as a partnership of soul companions. And forget about the political system under which you live. Try instead to imagine a monarchy without any sort of vehicle through which the people can make their voices heard. And imagine a world in which a queen must not only wait to be summoned by her husband, but in which she can be killed for showing up on her own initiative. Now imagine you're queen and it's been a full month since your husband summoned you, and someone tells you to go ask him for something. Something big—like flip-flopping on his edict. What emotions might you be feeling?



6. Up until this point in the narrative, Esther has compromised. Now she's faced with a situation in which she must show courage. What situations are you currently facing that require courage?

7. One of the messages of the Book of Esther is that God is in control. Talk to the Immortal, Invisible, All-Wise God about what's on your heart. Ask Him to reverse circumstances in your behalf for His glory. Express your affirmation that He is in control.

Group Option

As a group, discuss the following:

- 1) Discuss some of the terrible circumstances in our world today that seem outside of God's control.
- 2) What might be the purposes of a delayed reward, such as in the case of Mordecai?
- 3) Tell about a circumstance in your life that God "flip-flopped."

Play Your Hand

Decorate a playing card or a playing-card-sized piece of paper or cardboard with something associated with the following:

- "The sovereign God controls even the [pur](#)."
- An area of your life in which you must "stick your neck out" and risk it all.
- How you find yourself similar to Haman.
- How you find yourself similar to Mordecai.