



On your marks

Esther is one of a small group of godly heroines in the Old Testament. Her courage in speaking up to defend the exiled Jewish people is celebrated yearly in the Jewish festival of Purim. Although God is not mentioned in this Bible book, God is nevertheless at work in all the twists and turns of the narrative.

Sometimes it seems as if God is not obviously with us, but God's promise never to leave us is being kept. Just as God helped Queen Esther to make the right decision, God can help us when we do not know what to do.

Get set

You can find a version of this story for Key Stage 2 readers in the Barnabas Children's Bible (stories 227-231, pages 200-204).

If you are using the following idea to tell the story, encourage as much participation and interaction as possible. Some stage directions are included below but, in particular, the phrase **God was quiet but God was there** should become a recurring theme, accompanied by a finger to lips as everyone whispers it together.

The following props will be useful: a crown; perfume spray; toy tiara; toy sword; medallion; diary; large blow-up dice; model sceptre; pocket watch.

Some key truths from this story are:

- God was quiet but God was there
- God helps us to do the right thing
- God has planned something special that God wants us to do

NB: The Jewish festival of Purim is celebrated near the time of Passover. Esther's decision to take a risk and save her people looks forward to Jesus's decision to save us all.

Go!

Are you ready for a story?

Today's story is from God's special book, the Bible. There are loads of stories in this special book. Stories to help us become the best we can be; stories that teach us more about God; stories that teach us more about ourselves; stories that can change our lives; stories about God's love.

Lots of the stories are mostly about men. It was men who wrote down these stories inspired by God and they tended to remember the stories about men best. But there are some stories about women



who trusted God – women who made a big difference.

Today's story is about a woman who was a hero for all the people of God.

It's a strange story. God isn't mentioned in it at all. It seems as if God wasn't there. But of course God was. God was definitely there.

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

It's often the way. Quietly God helps us to the right thing. And quietly God helped the hero of this story to do the right thing.

Are you ready for the story?

Show a crown

Once long ago there was a king. He was the most powerful king of his time. He ruled over countries far and wide. He was rich. He commanded armies. His word was law.

But he was also a bit silly. He spent all his wealth on parties – parties that lasted months and months, with the very best food served on plates of gold. He was also silly because he let his advisers tell him what to do. He sometimes got himself tangled up in laws that he passed, which weren't very wise. And he lost his temper very quickly.

Once, during a big party, he commanded his queen to come in so that he could show her off to his guests. She refused to be treated like that. He was furious. It looked as if the king was being told what to do by his wife. He ranted and raved, and his advisers said, 'Banish the queen and choose a new queen instead.'

There's been no mention of God yet.

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show and maybe carefully spray a little perfume

The king's advisers said, 'Have a beauty contest to find yourself the best replacement queen.' So all the young women of the kingdom were gathered and sent for beauty treatment. Not just a weekend at a beauty spa but a whole year of potions and creams and mascara and lipstick and hairspray and more.

One of the young girls was Esther. She was one of the people of God, part of a family taken prisoner many years ago, who now lived in the kingdom. She had lost her mum and dad when she was young so she had been brought up by her elder cousin, Mordecai.

They were both part of the people of God and they must have often wondered where God was, because they were exiles in a foreign land.



God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show a toy tiara

Guess what? Of all the women who had received the beauty treatment, Esther was definitely the most beautiful, and the king fell in love with her and decided to make her his new queen. Queen Esther the first!

There was no mention of God in all this, but God had a plan for Esther.

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show a toy sword

Now the king may have been very powerful but he had powerful enemies too. Once, when cousin Mordecai was visiting the palace, he overheard people plotting to kill the king. He didn't like the king himself - after all, his family had been brought to the kingdom as prisoners long ago - but he was a loyal citizen. He knew that was what God wanted him to be. So he whispered what he had heard to Esther, and Esther told the guards, and the guards told the king. Esther and Mordecai saved the king's life.

There was no mention of God in all this.

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show a medallion

Sometime later, there was a new prime minister, second in command to the king. His name was Haman. He was a vain man who was more interested in his wealth and position than in being a good leader. He wanted everyone to go down on their knees to him.

And guess what? Everyone did... except Mordecai. Mordecai believed in God and believed that only God should be worshipped like that. He wouldn't bow down to Haman, and Haman hated him for it. In fact, their families were old enemies from long ago. It made Haman furious.

No one's mentioned God yet... did you notice?

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show a diary

One night, the king could not sleep. He tossed and turned. So he got up in the middle of the night and started reading through his old records. There he discovered that, years ago, a man called Mordecai had helped save his life. He wanted to reward Mordecai, so the next day he instructed Haman to give Mordecai an expensive new robe and to have him taken on a parade through the capital.



How Haman hated doing that! It made him determined to get rid of Mordecai and all the people of God. What was God doing?

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show a large blow-up dice

Now, you remember I said that the king was at the mercy of his advisers. Well, Haman convinced the king that Mordecai and his kind should all be killed. He bribed the king with a huge amount of money to make a law that this must happen - a law that could not be changed even by the king. And he threw dice to decide on which day of the coming month it would happen.

Mordecai would be killed and God's people would be killed. Queen Esther would be killed too, although the king didn't know that she secretly believed in the one true God. What was God doing?

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show a model sceptre

Mordecai was scared. He knew that this was really serious. Soon God's people would be wiped out if something wasn't done. Perhaps the king could do something to help? But who could talk to the king? Esther was queen but even she could only talk to the king if he gave her permission, by holding out his sceptre to her. If she spoke out of turn, she would be killed.

It would be a huge risk, but only Queen Esther could possibly save God's people.

Show a watch

It was Esther's time. Maybe this was why she had become queen. Maybe God had put her there for this very purpose. It was her time to do the right thing. She asked Mordecai and his friends to pray for her.

God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

Show the sceptre again

Courageous Esther waited for the right moment, when the king was sitting in his throne room. She asked to speak... and the king held out his sceptre and listened to her.

She took things carefully, first by asking that the king invite Haman to a meal and then by inviting them to a second meal, lulling Haman into a false sense of security.

And then she revealed Haman's horrible plan to kill the people of God.

The king was furious. He had Haman taken away and killed.



God was quiet but God was there (*repeat*)

But it wasn't quite over. The law could not be changed - the people of God could still be killed. The king promoted Mordecai to be the new prime minister and he passed a second law which allowed the people of God to defend themselves when they were attacked. It worked out OK. God's people were saved by Queen Esther's bravery.

Wow! God may have been quiet in this story but God was there all the time, helping Queen Esther and Mordecai to do the right thing.

Very often, God is silent during most of our days, but God is always there and will help us to do the right thing.

Sometimes there is a special moment, just like there was for Queen Esther, when the right thing we do can change everything.

I wonder what special thing God wants you to do at the right time this week.