

You Were
**MADE FOR
THIS
MOMENT**

COURAGE FOR TODAY AND HOPE FOR TOMORROW

MAX LUCADO



THOMAS NELSON
Since 1798

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*To our precious friend, Margaret Bishop.
An Esther of your generation, you model courage,
faith, and beauty. Denalyn and I are honored to know
you and thrilled to grandparent alongside you.*



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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Once upon a time, in a moment before moments existed, two angels were reviewing the job description of a yet-to-be-born fellow named Max. The assignment said: *writer of Christian books*. Yet, when the angels saw the skill set of Max and the responsibility of an author, one angel said, “We need to take this up the chain of command. Lucado ain’t got what it takes to do this job.” The other angel replied, “I don’t like your grammar, but agree with your concern.”

So, they sought an explanation. Here is what they were told. “You are correct. Lucado is going to need all the help heaven can muster. As a result, the following team members are assigned to keep him afloat:

- Liz Heaney and Karen Hill—editors of exceptional skill. They could prod a donkey to dance and teach a fish to sing.
- Carol Bartley—she is so capable, that we plan to ask her to copy edit the Book of Life for typos.
- David Drury—had he been born two thousand years earlier, he would have been on epistle duty. He will keep Lucado on the doctrinal straight and narrow.

- Steve and Cheryl Green—everyone needs friends like Steve and Cheryl. We reserved them for Max.
- The HCCP team of heroes—Mark Schoenwald, Don Jacobson, Tim Paulson, Mark Glesne, Erica Smith, Janene MacIvor, and Laura Minchew. There’s enough talent on that team to run a galaxy.
- Greg and Susan Ligon—they are receiving twice the quota of spiritual gifts. They will lead, serve, administer, encourage, and counsel. Superstars, they are!
- Dave Treat—he prays like Daniel and looks like Moses.
- Peggy Campbell, Jim Sanders, and the Ambassador team—they are set apart from on high to shepherd dozens of spiritual shepherds. They will treat Lucado with loving care.
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- Andrea Lucado—same last name, but far smarter than her dad.
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- Brett, Jenna, Rosie, Max, Andrea, Jeff, and Sara—a family tree with deep roots and abundant fruit.
- And Denalyn, the bride—each night Max will go to bed thinking, *I married an angel!* He will be right. She will be heaven-sent.”

The two angels looked at the other and smiled, “With a team like this,” one said, “even Lucado will be able to write.”

Chapter One

SEARCHING FOR SPRINGTIME



Winter casts a cold shadow. The days are short. The nights are long. The sun seems shy, hidden behind the grayness. Warmth has packed her bags and migrated to the tropics. Beach weather would be nice.

But that's not going to happen. It's winter.

Spring will see blossoms. Summer sways leafy bushes in the wind. Autumn gives forth a harvest of plenty. But winter? Winter is still, deathly still. Fields are frosty. Trees extend skeletal limbs. Wildlife is silent. Gone.

Winter brings danger. Blizzards. Ice storms. Caution is the theme. Come springtime you'll run barefoot through the meadow and plunge into the pond. But now? It's best to button up, zip up, stay in, and stay safe.

It's winter out there.

Is it winter where you are? Are you trapped in a perpetual gloom? Do you know the solstice of sunless days and barren trees?

I know a mom who does. A mom of three kids. Two in diapers and one with a disability. Her apartment is small. Her income is meager. And her husband is AWOL. Life in Camp Chaos was too much for him. It's too much for her as well. But what choice does she have? Somebody always needs to be fed, changed, held, or bathed. So she does whatever needs doing, and it appears she will be doing it forever. She wonders if this winter will ever pass.

So does my friend Ed. He and I have much in common. Our health is good. Our golf game is poor. We both like dogs. We both have marriages that predate the Carter administration. The difference? My wife just asked me what I want for dinner. His keeps asking him who he is. He placed her in a memory-care facility a year ago. They'd dreamed of touring the country in an RV. So far he's spent his retirement sleeping alone and making daily visits to a woman who stares out the window.

Can you relate? When did you first realize that life was not going to turn out the way you thought?

Your parents divorced.

Your spouse cheated.

Your health never recovered.

Your friend never returned.

In that moment a Siberian cold settled over your life. Your world became an arctic circle of dark days, long nights, and bitter weather.

Winter.

This book was born in winter. As I pen these words, every person on the planet is living in the frostnip of COVID-19. A pandemic has locked us down. The mom I told you about? Her income is meager because her restaurant job was discontinued. Ed can still see his wife but only through a window. Church doors are closed. Students are stuck at home. Masks hide smiles. A microscopic virus has paralyzed us.

And an ancient sin threatens to undo us. Those of us who'd hoped racism was fading were convinced otherwise. An officer's knee on the neck of a Black man activated a subterranean anger. A volcano spewed into the streets of many cities.

The entire world seems wrapped in winter. We are all searching for springtime.

Winters are a part of life—some personal, some global—but all are powerful. Try as we might to bundle up and lean into the wind,

the heartiest among us can fall. The wind is too strong. Nights are too long, and the question is all too common: Will this winter ever pass? You wonder (don't you wonder?) if you will survive this.

If so, God has a six-letter word of encouragement for you: E-S-T-H-E-R.

The book that bears her name was written to be read in winter-time. Written for the emotionally weary. Written for the person who feels outnumbered by foes, outmaneuvered by fate, and outdone by fear. It's as if God, in his kind providence, heard all the prayers of all the souls who have ever been stuck in an arctic February. To every person who has longed to see a green sprig on a barren branch, he says, "Follow me. I want you to see what I can do."

He escorts us to the front row of a grand theater and invites us to take a seat. He nods at the symphony conductor. The baton is lifted, the music begins, the curtain opens, and we are eyewitnesses to a triumph of divine drama.

The setting is the city of Susa in fifth century BC Persia (modern-day Iran). The empire was to its day what Rome was to the first century. During the reign of Darius I, also known as Darius the Great (522–486 BC), "it controlled more than 2.9 million square miles." The empire consisted of roughly 44 percent of the world's population, an estimated 50 million people.¹ It stretched some 4,464 miles from what is now Punjab, India, to Khartoum, Sudan.² To get the scope of it, walk from Los Angeles to Atlanta, turn around, and walk back to LA. Or, if you prefer, duplicate the United States map, set the two copies side by side, and you get a feel for the breadth of the Persian Empire.

The cast consists of a memorable quartet of characters.

Xerxes, the king, had a thirst for wine, a disregard for women, and convictions that changed with the weather. He ruled over Persia from 486 to 465 BC.³ His name in Hebrew was Ahasuerus, which pronounced correctly sounds like a good sneeze. For that reason his

name in Greek—Xerxes—will be my choice. (Besides, any name that makes double use of the letter *X* is fun to write.)

The book of Esther portrays him as a wimp, an accomplished drinker, but not much of a thinker. He was most comfortable holding a goblet and delegating decisions. The story attributes to him no profound thoughts or statesmanlike decrees. Catch him in the right mood, and he'd agree to genocide.

At least that was the experience of Haman, the villain in our story. His name sounds like “hangman,” which is convenient, because this tyrant was all about death. He was a wealthy and influential officer in the cabinet of Xerxes. His jet was private. His wardrobe was tailored. He got manicures on Mondays and played golf with Xerxes on Thursdays. He had the ear of the king, the swagger of a pimp, and the compassion of Hitler.

Yes, that's accurate. We see a lot of Adolf in Haman. Both demanded to be worshipped. Both were intolerant of subversion. And both set out to exterminate the entire Jewish race. Can't you almost hear Hitler saying what Haman said?

Then Haman said to King Ahasuerus, “There is a certain people scattered and dispersed among the people in all the provinces of your kingdom; their laws are different from all other people's, and they do not keep the king's laws. Therefore it is not fitting for the king to let them remain. If it pleases the king, let a decree be written that they be destroyed, and I will pay ten thousand talents of silver into the hands of those who do the work, to bring it into the king's treasuries.” (Est. 3:8–9 NKJV)

Those “certain people” were none other than the Hebrew nation: the children of Israel, descendants of Abraham, and the family tree of Jesus Christ. They were scattered throughout the Persian Empire. To Haman they were inconsequential flecks of dandruff on the royal

robe of Xerxes. But to God they were a chosen race through whom he would redeem humankind.

One of the exiled Jews really got under Haman's skin. His name was Mordecai. You're going to love him eventually. But you'll be puzzled by him initially. Quite content to be quiet, he chose to keep his ancestry under wraps. But a person could take only so much of Haman.

"Mordecai had a cousin . . . whom he had brought up" because she was an orphan. She must have been a head turner. Esther "had a lovely figure and was beautiful" (Est. 2:7). The ancient rabbinical writings position her as one of the four most beautiful women in the world, along with Sarah, Rahab, and Abigail.⁴ She gained access to the king because of her appearance, but her story has relevance to yours because of her conviction and courage.

Are you sensing the elements of the drama?

A clueless brute of a king.

A devious, heartless, bloodthirsty Haman.

A nation of Jews under the threat of extermination.

Mordecai, defiant and determined.

Esther, gorgeous and gutsy.

And God? Where is God in the story? Aah, there's a question fit for the asking.

The book of Esther is known for being one of the two books in the Bible that never mention the name of God.⁵ Until this point he has been everywhere, seemingly on every page. In Eden the Creator. In Ur the Prompter. In Egypt the Liberator. In the promised land the Warrior. But in Persia? The trail has grown cold.

At no point do we read "And God said" or "God chose" or "God decreed." There is no mention of the temple or the name *Yahweh* or *Elohim*, Hebrew nouns meaning God. There is no mention of apocalyptic visions, as Daniel saw, or concern for God's law, as Ezra expressed. Prayer is implied but not described. The seas do not split. The heavens do not roar. No dry bones come to life.

Why? Why the absence of spirituality? Why the seeming silence of God?

If you are in the midst of winter, you can relate to these questions. God may seem hidden to you. Distant. Removed. Absent from your script. Your world feels cut loose from the sun.

Others hear from God. You don't. Others say they know the will of God. You're bewildered. Others have a backstage pass to his performance. But you? You can't find his name on the playbill. Is he there? Does he care? You're unsure.

Might you be open to a gold nugget that lies in the substratum of the Esther story? Quiet providence. *Providence* is the two-dollar term theologians use to describe God's continuous control over history. He not only spoke the universe into being, but he governs it by his authority. He is "sustaining all things by his powerful word" (Heb. 1:3). He is regal, royal, and—this is essential—he is *right here*. He is not preoccupied with the plight of Pluto at the expense of your problems and pain.

He has been known to intervene dramatically. By his hand the Red Sea opened, the manna fell from heaven, a virgin gave birth, and a tomb gave life. Yet for every divine shout there are a million whispers. The book of Esther relates the story of our whispering God, who in unseen and inscrutable ways superintends all the actions and circumstances for the good of his people. This priceless book

reminds us that he need not be loud to be strong. He need not cast a shadow to be present. God is still eloquent in his seeming silence and still active when he appears most distant.

Does God seem absent to you?

If so, the book of Esther deserves your attention. Allow yourself to be caught up in the drama.

God is still
eloquent in his
seeming silence
and still active
when he appears
most distant.

Act 1—*Confusion*: God’s people choose the glamor of Persia over the goodness of God. Compromise replaces conviction. Confusion replaces clarity.

Act 2—*Crisis*: A decree of death places all Jews on life support. What hope does a fringe minority have in a pagan society?

Act 3—*Conquest*: The unimaginable happens. Something so unexpected that “sorrow turned to joy, [and their] mourning somersaulted into a holiday for parties and fun and laughter” (Est. 9:22 THE MESSAGE).

The theme of the book of Esther—indeed, the theme of the Bible—is that all the injustices of the world will be turned on their head. Grand reversals are God’s trademark. When we feel as though everything is falling apart, God is working in our midst, causing everything to fall into place. He is the King of quiet providence, and he invites you and me to partner with him in his work. The headline of the book of Esther reads: *Relief will come. . . . Will you be a part of it?*

When all seems lost, it’s not. When evil seems to own the day, God still has the final say. He has a Joseph for every famine and a David for every Goliath. When his people need rescuing, God calls a Rahab into service. When a baby Moses needs a mama, God prompts an Egyptian princess to have compassion. He always has his person.

He had someone in the story of Esther.

And in your story he has you.

You want to retreat, stay quiet, stay safe, stay backstage. *I don’t have what it takes*, you tell yourself. You could dismiss the “made for this moment” idea as mere folly.

But I oh-so-hope you won’t.

Relief will come. . . . Will you be a part of it?

Grand
reversals
are God’s
trademark.

The headline of the
book of Esther reads:
Relief will come. . . .
Will you be a part of it?



This world gets messy, for sure. But God's solutions come through people of courage. People like Mordecai and Esther. People like you. People who dare to believe that they, by God's grace, were made to face a moment like this.

For those stuck in acts 1 and 2, be assured act 3 is on the way. In God's plan confusion and crisis give way to conquest. Winters don't last forever. Trees will soon bud. Snow will soon melt. Springtime is only a turn of the calendar away. For all we know God's hand is about to turn the page.

ACT 1

CONFUSION

FAITH IN A FAITHLESS WORLD



The couple sat wordlessly at the table. He picked at the lentil-and-lamb stew on his plate. She stared at the food on hers. "You've not taken a bite," he finally said. "You need to eat."

"I'm not hungry."

He began to object but then thought better of it. He looked at her young face, bathed in candlelight. Silken skin. High cheekbones. Brown eyes speckled with a hint of gold.

"Esther," he offered softly, "this is the best plan."

She raised her face to look at his. Moisture had gathered in her eyes, ready to spill. "But they will know. They will find out."

"Not if you are careful. Say little. Offer nothing. Go unnoticed."

Her eyes asked for help.

"Our people are adrift here in Susa. No one remembers Jerusalem. No one remembers the temple. Your parents—may their memory be blessed—lived and died in Persia. We will do the same. It's best to make the best of it."

"But he will demand so much of me."

Mordecai ran his fingers through his gray hair and then reached across the table for her hand. "We have no choice. The king has issued the order. The soldiers will come for you tomorrow. We cannot avoid the edict."

Mordecai sighed and stood and walked to the window. From his house in the citadel, he could faintly hear the evening prayers and see

the flickering lights of Al-Yahudu, the town of the Judeans, a segregated community of Jews. He often looked out over the village but seldom visited it. Its residents didn't understand him. He, with his place in the court. He, with his buried identity. He, with his hidden faith.

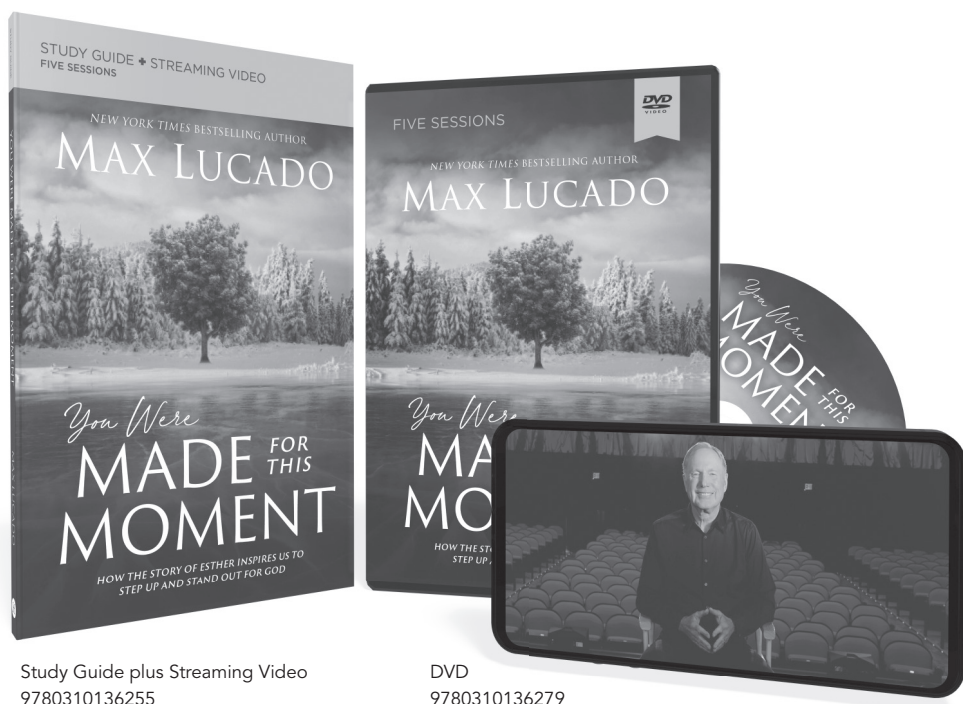
And he didn't understand them. Can a person not manage more than one loyalty? A compromise here. A secret there. Fudge a few facts. Who's to know?

"Besides, Esther," he said as he turned to face her, "this could be our opportunity. Who knows what doors will open for us?"

"Yes, but who knows what we will lose in the process?" She stood and joined him at the window.

Mordecai placed an arm around her shoulders and whispered, "The Lord will be with you, as will I."

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