

The Inward Beauty of a Godly Woman

“Strength and honor are her clothing; and she shall rejoice in time to come.” (Prov 31:25).

“There was in Shushan the capital a man who was a Jew, whose name was Mordekhai the son of Ya’ir, the son of Shim’i, the son of Kish, a Binyamini. He had been exiled from Yerushalayim with the captives exiled with Y’khanyah king of Y’hudah, whom N’vukhadnetzar king of Bavel had carried off. He had raised Hadassah, that is, Ester, his uncle's daughter; because she had neither father nor mother. The girl was shapely and good-looking; after her father's and mother's death, Mordekhai had adopted her as his own daughter.” (Esther 2: 5-7)

Hadassah is a Jewish girl and an orphan and she is raised by her cousin, an unknown himself (Mordecai was a man of G-dly stock, the son of Ya’ir, that is, Jairus). Not much else is recorded about Esther except that she was shapely and stunning. Her life is a classic example of an uneventful beginning that leads to an unbelievable ending. You will also note that such are the circumstances of heroes in the Bible—heroes such as Joseph, Moses, David, Daniel, Ruth, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Eliyahu, *Yeshua*, an unending list. Humble beginnings are more of a qualification than a disqualification with G-d! In fact, being Jewish and fatherless (motherless), husbandless, enslaved, persecuted, destitute, poor, fill in the blanks, appear to be the Bible resume of someone that is in line to be used mightily by G-d.

There is truth in the age-old maxim *“The hand that rocks the cradle rules the world.”* That hand is the strong yet tender hand of a mother, who not only bears the children but rears them as well. It is no wonder that when the cameras are turned on the athlete who's just done an incredible feat, the first words to come out of his mouth are *“Hi, Mom!”*

But as if raising a houseful of children isn't enough of a job, the married woman has at least one other demanding career—that of a wife. She is there for her husband either as the wind beneath his wings or the one who lets the air out of his tires. Proverbs talks about both kinds of wives. The ideal is the excellent wife (*Echet Chayil*) of Proverbs 31. *“Her worth is far above jewels; her husband can entrust his heart to her completely because ‘she does him good and not evil all the days of her life’”* (Prov. 31:11,12). Such a woman—one who fears the Lord—will be praised (Prov. 31:30). And such a woman was Esther. Over the course of her life, Esther demonstrated four strengths more often seen in women than men:

- Intuition—the ability to see through situations, sense the unspoken, perceive the feelings underneath the surface
- Endurance—the ability to handle pain, stay at a task through insuperable odds, persevere
- Responsiveness—the willingness to express feelings, respond to others, show warmth and affection
- Vulnerability—the courage to confess weakness, admit fear, ask for help

Esther also exemplified many more truths about a Godly woman's value and strengths.

A gracious woman obtains honor. (Prov. 11:16a)

A capable wife is a crown for her husband (Prov. 12:4a)

He who finds a wife finds a great good; he has won the favor of ADONAI. (Prov. 18:22)

A house and wealth are inherited from ancestors, but a sensible wife is from ADONAI. (Prov. 19:14)

Esther: The King's Favorite ... and Why

Let's pick up Esther's Purim story in the powder room of the palace, where the contestants are putting on their makeup for the Miss Persia pageant.

"When the king's order and decree were proclaimed, and many girls assembled in Shushan the capital under the care of Hegai, Ester too was taken into the king's house and put under the care of Hegai, who was in charge of the women." (Esther 2:8)

The verb was taken doesn't connote volunteerism. In fact, this verb can mean "taken by force." Some Jewish scholars accept this interpretation, although there is nothing in the text to reinforce that idea. However, it could well be that Esther was reluctant to participate. After all, she was a Jew, and becoming a concubine or marrying a Gentile was against Torah (see Deut. 7:1-6).

When you imagine how competitive the contestants must have been at the prospect of being chosen queen, Esther's reluctance must have come across as wonderfully unique. Undoubtedly, Esther's inner beauty eclipsed the jealous, greedy, self-absorbed women of the harem, and that's what caught *Hegai's* eye. In the passages that follow, at least six of her attractive qualities stand out.

The first one is a grace-filled charm and elegance.

The girl pleased him and won his favor, so that he lost no time in giving her her cosmetics, her portions <of special food> and seven girls from the king's palace to attend her; he also promoted her and the girls attending her to the best place in the harem's quarters. (Esther 2:9)

In Hebrew, the first sentence in verse 9 literally states: "*She lifted up grace before his face.*" Her manner exuded pleasantness in the presence of others. So fragrant was this quality that its aroma prompted *Hegai* to act "quickly" and to treat her preferentially.

The second quality is an unusual restraint and control.

Esther did not make known her people or her kindred. Esther knew the value of verbal restraint. Even when she became queen, she kept the secret Mordecai had told her to keep ("*Esther did not disclose her people or family ties, because Mordechai had instructed her not to tell anyone.*" Esther 2:10). That must have created not only an air of mystery about her but an aura of charm as well.

The third characteristic is a continually teachable spirit.

Becoming a finalist in this beauty pageant didn't go to Esther's head, and neither would becoming queen. Isn't it lovely to come across a woman of such stunning beauty who also has such a teachable spirit, such a willingness to listen and learn? Sometimes the more gifted we are-or

the more physically endowed, the more popular, the more prominent in position—the less teachable we become. This is unfortunate, because none of those gifts gives us a corner on wisdom.

The fourth quality is an unselfish modesty and authenticity.

“Each girl had her turn to appear before King Achashverosh after she had undergone the full twelve-month preparation period prescribed for the women, consisting of a six-month treatment with oil of myrrh and six months with perfumes and other cosmetics for women. Then, when the girl went to see the king, whatever she wanted would be given to her as she went from the harem's house to the king's palace. She would go in the evening, and on the following day she would return to another part of the harem's house and be under the care of Sha'ashgaz the king's officer in charge of the concubines. She would not go to the king again unless he was especially pleased with her and had her summoned by name.” (Esther 2:12-14)

By the way, the women's futures rested on that one night with the king—those rejected lived the rest of their lives like widows. Clearly, the process of preparing for a night with the king was lengthy and expensive. Imagine the setting: it must have been like going into Nordstrom or Neiman-Marcus and being able to take any of the dresses off the rack, any of the jewelry from the showcases, and a whole line of cosmetic products—all at no cost. No doubt, most of the women went on an extravagant and unrestrained shopping spree—all except for Esther.

“When the turn came for Ester the daughter of Avichayil, whose nephew Mordechai had adopted her as his own daughter, to appear before the king, she didn't ask for anything other than what Hegai the king's officer in charge of the harem advised. Yet Ester was admired by all who saw her.” (Esther 2:15)

The fifth quality is comeliness, regardless of her surroundings.

Did you note in verse 15 that Esther made no extravagant demands? She listened attentively to Hegai and followed his advice. Her winsomeness and charm not only compelled Hegai but totally captivated the king. Compared to the other women in the harem, she stood out in Ahasuerus' eyes like a stately swan in a duck pond.

“She was brought to King Achashverosh in his royal palace in the tenth month, Tevet, during the seventh year of his reign. The king liked Ester more than any of his wives; none of the other virgins obtained such favor and approval from him. So he put the royal crown on her head and made her queen in place of Vashti.” (Esther 2:16-17)

The sixth quality is a humble respect for authority.

“The king then gave a great banquet in Ester's honor for all his officers and servants, decreed a holiday for the provinces and distributed gifts worthy of royal bounty. When the girls would gather on other occasions, Mordechai would sit at the King's Gate. Ester had not yet revealed her family ties or her people, as Mordechai had ordered her; for Ester continued obeying what Mordechai told her to do, as she had when he was raising her.” (vv. 2:18-20)

Now was Esther's golden opportunity to revel in her newly acquired position as queen, to throw off the shackles of accountability. But she resisted the temptation. She still submitted to Mordecai's counsel—a course of action that would later catapult her to the heights of heroism.

God's Design Principles for Modern Day Men and Women

The primary applications for this message appear to be aimed at women, but the principles run deeper than gender distinctions. They apply to men as well, for the cultivation of character is the focal point of our message. We're addressing what we are on the inside, not how we appear on the outside. So if you'll turn on the lights and squint in the mirror, we'll see what can be done for that hidden person of the heart.

- ◆ *Ask G-d to cultivate within you a discontent with the superficial and a desire for the spiritual. "May the Outward and inward man be at one."* I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and live as I was meant to in the eye of G-d.
- ◆ *Trust G-d to control the circumstances around you.* Remember Esther. The atmosphere of such a competitive "beauty pageant" is a difficult one in which to preserve the beauty of the inner self. Yet this is precisely the soil where Esther blossomed.
- ◆ *G-d's basic purpose in creating us is that we have fellowship with Him through Messiah Yeshua and that we experience the full potential of Messiah working in and through these bodies of ours.* (see John 10:10; 17:3 and Phil. 3:8)
- ◆ *Satan is aware of the potential which G-d has put within our lives, and he desires to totally destroy or at least partially diminish its potential.* ("...Flee youthful lusts." see 2 Tim. 2:20-22)
- ◆ *Satan's initial method of operation is to get us to believe that G-d has cheated or will cheat us out of that which we should rightfully have.* (see Gen. 3:4,5 and Col. 2:8-10)
- ◆ *Before we were born, G-d prescribed our unchangeable features in accordance with His plans for our lives.* (see Job 10:8-9; Ps. 119:73; Ps 139:14,16; Isa. 45:9)
- ◆ *G-d is not finished making us yet.* (see Eph. 2:10; Ps. 138:8)
- ◆ *There is no such thing as a "Universal Ideal" in outward appearance.* (1 Sam. 16:7; Isa. 53:2)
- ◆ *There is a universal ideal on inward character qualities—reproducing the character of Messiah Yeshua by the power of G-d's Spirit and by His grace* (the desire and power G-d gives to do his will). (Ro. 8:29; Gal. 4:19; Col. 2:9; Gal. 5:22-23)
- ◆ *Our happiness is not dependent on our outward beauty but on our ability to experience the character of Messiah Yeshua.* (see Matt. 5:3-12; 6:33; Ps. 17:15)
- ◆ *If necessary, G-d sacrifices outward beauty to develop inward qualities, since our happiness is based on having those qualities.* (see 2 Cor. 4:10; 16-17; Ro. 9:20-21)
- ◆ *Our fulfillment in life comes by being a unique message on how to develop the inward qualities of the Lord, Messiah Yeshua.* (see 1 Pet. 2:9; 2 Cor. 3:2; Prov. 15:23)
- ◆ *Differences in appearance, abilities, parentage and social heritage are G-d's special frames to highlight and amplify His unique message through us.* (see 2 Cor. 12:9-10; 1 Cor. 1:27,29,31)
- ◆ *G-d's reputation is at stake in what we do with our appearance, abilities, etc.* (Ex. 4:11-12)