

🌿 **Goal:** To look to God and within ourselves for strength and courage.

### Connecting with the Biblical Text

The opening chapter of the book of Esther is a story unto itself, but it also sets the stage for the remaining chapters. King Ahasuerus hosts all the important men in the area at a feast, and when this six-month-long feast is over, he invites the local notables to a weeklong feast. This takes place in the lavish courtyard of the palace, beautifully and exquisitely described in the text. Meanwhile, Queen Vashti is having her own feast for women in another part of the palace. It is clear from the text that the men are drinking heavily and that anything goes. (Esth. 1:7). The king’s party comes to a standstill when the queen refuses to come to him wearing her crown, to show his guests how beautiful she is. Disobeying the king’s order is not allowed and could lead to death! To solve this problem of the queen’s insubordination (and fearful that other wives will follow her example), the king issues an edict that Vashti will never come before the king again and will have her title of queen taken away. Nevertheless, we aren’t told of her reaction nor if she was banished from the palace.

### Connecting with the World

- 🌿 History has many stories of people who said no to the reigning power structures. Perhaps the first one that comes to mind today is Rosa Parks, as her no set off the Montgomery bus boycott. While she was not the first woman to refuse to move to the back of the bus or to give up her seat for a white person, she did so and made history. For more about her and the bus boycott, go to [bit.ly/GLMontgomeryBusBoycott](http://bit.ly/GLMontgomeryBusBoycott).

- 🌿 A number of issues about inequality and the treatment of women could be named. Lilly Ledbetter fought a case of sexual discrimination all the way to the Supreme Court and won. You can read about her life and case at [bit.ly/GLLillyLedbetter](http://bit.ly/GLLillyLedbetter).

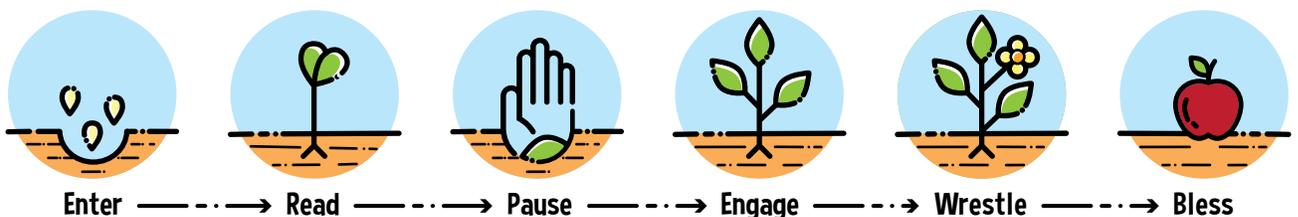
### Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Children

The story of Vashti is often omitted when telling the story of Esther to children. It’s unfortunate, because Vashti presents an image of a strong, self-assured woman in a male-dominated setting. She is also a contrast to the course and direction that Esther took. Both choices are viable. While it is unlikely that Vashti worships the God of Israel, she is still a part of the story of God’s people. Her actions paved the way for Esther to help, and indeed save, the people of God. Just as Matthew included Gentile women in the genealogy of Jesus (Matthew 1), so we can include Gentile women in our family stories from the Old Testament or Hebrew Scriptures.

### Connecting with the Spiritual Lives of Adults

- 🌿 Read Vashti’s story as though you are a man of the court or one of the king’s advisers. What are your fears during this episode?
- 🌿 Read Vashti’s story as it might be told to the other women in the court or Ahasuerus’s harem. What are your concerns and your private joys?
- 🌿 In your prayers this week, ask for God’s help in determining when it is important for you to say no.

*God behind the scenes, keep my heart and eyes open to times when I can be a model of resistance. Amen.*



## Gathering Supplies

Based on your choices, you will need:

- ✦ *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible*
- ✦ Mural paper
- ✦ Art supplies
- ✦ Rope or heavy string, 15 feet long
- ✦ 3 flags, beanbags, or other markers
- ✦ *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles (Scholastic Press, 1995) or internet-connected device
- ✦ *Courage* by Bernard Waber (Houghton Mifflin Co., 2002) or internet-connected device
- ✦ One heavy item, such as a gallon of water or a hand weight
- ✦ Two royal outfits—costumes or fancy clothes, beads, crowns, shoes, and so forth

## Preparing to Lead

In a Bible, read chapter 1 of the book of Esther as well as “Queen Vashti Says ‘No!’” in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 66–67) and consider whether you have heard this passage preached or taught. This chapter in the book of Esther is a quirky little part of the story that is often overlooked, but in reality, it sets up the rest of the book. Ponder the following questions:

- ✦ What can you tell about this king and queen from this chapter?
- ✦ Why do you think Vashti said no to the king?
- ✦ Do you think she realized it would mean the end of her reign as queen?

Consider the children in your group. What might this story have to say to them? Recall their faces and names. Pray for them and for your time together.

Spread a large piece of mural paper on a table or the floor of the room for the opening mural. If you plan to use the “Power Play” activity, tie the 15-foot rope securely into a loop.



### Enter into sacred space together.

As the children arrive, invite them to imagine what it would be like to be a king or queen. Explore questions such as:

- ✦ What are some of the things you would like about being king or queen?

- ✦ What might be some of the things you wouldn't like?
- ✦ What kind of rules or traditions would you put in place for your kingdom?

Work together to imagine their ideal kingdom and have each person draw their vision on the giant piece of mural paper. Continue to prompt their creativity while they are drawing using the following questions:

- ✦ What would your perfect kingdom look like?
- ✦ What would you include? Fancy rooms? Entertainment spaces? Exotic pets?
- ✦ What kinds of food would you want to eat?
- ✦ What do you think would be the best part of being a king or queen?
- ✦ What tasks or rules would you want to get rid of?

When finished, compare the different drawings, looking for similarities and differences in the ideal kingdoms.

Explain that in today's story, they will meet a king and queen and hear about one important day in their kingdom. Lead the children in the following prayer, inviting them to repeat each line after you:

Holy Lord, /  
 we thank you for creating us /  
 with imagination and creativity /  
 that lets us dream. /  
 Help us to use our imaginations /  
 as we hear your word for us. /  
 Help us to be strong and courageous /  
 and to stand up for what is right. /  
 Amen. /



### Read a story of God's people.

Encourage the children to listen carefully to the story as it is read. Ask for volunteers to listen with the ears of King Ahasuerus, Queen Vashti, partygoers, a servant, or an adviser. Invite them to listen especially to what is happening with their character. Read “Queen Vashti Says ‘No!’” from *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* (p. 66).

**For small groups, children may have more than one role, or you can simply omit the partygoers role.**

## Leading



### Pause to let God's Word enter into hearts and minds.

Invite the children to pause and be quiet for a few moments. Encourage them to think about the story they just heard and what their character heard, saw, and felt.



### Engage curiosity and imagination with God's story.

When the children have had a moment to reflect, invite them to share what their character heard, saw, and did. Reread the story, this time encouraging the children to pantomime the roles that they paid attention to before. Discuss the following questions:

- ✦ Did your character do or say anything surprising? What and why?
- ✦ What happened when Vashti said no to the king?
- ✦ How do you think the king felt about Vashti's choice?
- ✦ How might Queen Vashti have felt about it?
- ✦ Who is using power in this story? In what way(s)?

Choose one or both options:

- Power Play
  - ✦ Tie the 15-foot rope or string securely to make a large loop. Lay it out on the floor space in the shape of an equilateral triangle.
  - ✦ Step out about four or five feet from each corner and drop one flag or marker at each corner.
  - ✦ Ask for three volunteers, one to take hold of the rope at each corner.
  - ✦ The goal of the game is to pull their corner of the rope far enough to reach their nearest flag, preventing the other players from doing the same.
  - ✦ Count down with, "Ready, set, go!" and let the three children pull until one person wins.
  - ✦ Take turns with other combinations of players, such as two or three per corner as group size and time allow.
  - ✦ Afterward, discuss the game using questions such as:
    - Who had power in this game? Did the same person win every time?
    - What kinds of power did you see used: physical, mental, size, anything else?

- How does this game help you think about the power play in the biblical story?
  - What kinds of power are being used and by whom?
  - Who won the power struggle between the king and queen? Explain why you think that way.

- Finding Strength and Courage in Ourselves

- ✦ Wonder together about how Queen Vashti felt when she sent her no in response to the king's request.
  - I wonder if Queen Vashti was afraid to tell the king no.
  - I wonder how Queen Vashti found the courage to refuse the king's command.
  - I wonder how Queen Vashti felt after she stood up to the king.
- ✦ Read aloud *The Story of Ruby Bridges* by Robert Coles, or show the YouTube video "The Story of Ruby Bridges by George Ford—Children's Read Aloud Book" ([bit.ly/GLRubyBridges](https://bit.ly/GLRubyBridges), 9:30).
- ✦ Invite the children into a discussion using the following prompts:
  - What do you think was the hardest thing that Ruby Bridges did?
  - Where do you think she found the strength and courage to do it?
  - What would you have prayed for if you were Ruby standing in front of the angry people?
- ✦ Invite the children to think of a time when they were afraid but found the strength and courage to do a hard thing. If they can't think of their own story, challenge them to think about someone they know or a character in a movie or story. Encourage the children to share their stories of strength and courage.



### Wrestle with our place in God's story.

Knowing when to cooperate with those in power and when to stand up against that power is sometimes difficult to discern. Invite the children to wrestle with and discuss the following questions:

- ✦ How do you know when to listen to those in charge (parents, teachers, community leaders)?
- ✦ What is an example of a time when listening to those in charge helped you?

## Leading

- ✦ What is an example of a time when you felt like a rule or a situation was wrong, and you needed to question the rule or push back against the people who were in charge?
- ✦ Do you think it is difficult for children to know when to listen to those in charge and when to push back? Why or why not?
- ✦ Why do you think Queen Vashti pushed back against the king's demands?

Choose one or both options:

### ○ Everyday Courage

- ✦ One of the character traits needed to stand up and make a change is *courage*. Sometimes we think of courage like Queen Vashti's as something only superheroes or larger-than-life characters can have. Explore what courage can look like in our everyday lives by reading aloud *Courage* by Bernard Waber or by showing the YouTube video "Courage by Bernard Waber" ([bit.ly/GLCourageByWaber](https://bit.ly/GLCourageByWaber), 4:00).
- ✦ Have a discussion about everyday courage in light of the book and what the children have learned from the story of Queen Vashti using the following questions:
  - When was a time that you needed courage?
  - When have you (or someone you can think of) needed to have the courage to say no or to stand up against something that wasn't right or fair?
  - How might your faith in God help you to know when to say yes or no?

### ○ Everyday Strength

- ✦ Another character trait needed to stand up and make a change is *strength*. Invite the children to take turns lifting a heavy object, such as a hand weight or a gallon of water.
  - What kinds of strength are required to do this task?
- ✦ Ask for two volunteers of approximately the same height and weight. Ask them to sit back-to-back on the floor and link elbows with each other. Invite them to try and stand up without unlinking their elbows.

- What kinds of strength are required to do this task, both mentally and physically?
- Invite the children to think of something they have done that was very challenging at school, home, sports, or other extracurricular activities.
- What kinds of strength are required to meet that challenge?
- What other kinds of strength can you think of?



### Bless one another with God's grace.

Invite the children to stand in a circle. Give the person on your right a high five or fist bump and say, "(Name), be strong and courageous like Vashti!" Invite them to pass this message around the circle until all have been reminded of their courage and strength. Close by saying "And God's children say . . ." and encouraging them to respond with "Amen!"



### Grow with more.

#### ○ Kings and Queens Game

- ✦ Play a relay game with a royal focus.
- ✦ Assemble two royal outfits using costumes or fancy clothes, beads, crowns, shoes, and so forth.
- ✦ Put each outfit in a pile at one end of the room.
- ✦ Form two equal groups of children and have them form two relay race lines.
- ✦ The first person on each team will run to that team's costume and put on all the clothes and jewelry.
- ✦ When they are dressed, the rest of the team should bow and shout, "Your majesty!" and the costumed child should take a bow.
- ✦ After bowing, they should take off the costume as quickly as possible and run back to tag the second person in line.
- ✦ This person repeats the above actions until all team members have had a turn to be the king or queen!