

# Q&A with Max Lucado

## Author of *You Were Made for This Moment*

**Q** How are the darkness and dangers of winter an apt metaphor for the challenging days many of us are living through?

**A** Spring will see blossoms. Summer sways bushy leaves 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. Especially if you are realizing that life is 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.

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**Q** How did COVID-19 affect your writing of this book?

**A** This book was born in a season of winter, as I just described. As I pen these words, every person on the planet is living in the frost-nip of COVID-19. A pandemic has locked us down. 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 most countries. The entire world seems wrapped in winter. We are all searching for springtime.

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**Q** How is the encouragement of Esther's story the perfect antidote to our current winter?

**A** The book that bears her name was written to be read in wintertime. 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.

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.

## Q Is it true that God is never mentioned in the Esther story?

A The book of Esther is famous for being one of only two books in the Bible that never mentions the name of God. Up 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, the Hebrew noun meaning God. There is no mention of Jerusalem. No apocalyptic visions, as Daniel saw, or concern for the 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 the question. God seems hidden to you. Distant. Removed. Absent from your script. Your world feels unchained 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.

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## Q How do you see God showing up in her story?

A 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. God 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. Esther relates the story of our whispering God. In unseen and inscrutable ways, he superintends all actions and circumstances for the good of his people. This priceless book reminds us 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.

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## Q Explain the three acts of the grand story you see told in the book of Esther.

A Act I--Confusion: God’s people choose the glamor of Persia over the goodness of God. Compromise replaces convictions. Confusion replaces clarity.

Act II--Crisis: a decree of death places three million Jews on life support. What hope does a fringe minority have in a pagan society?

Act III--Conquest: the unspeakable happens. Something so unexpected that “sorrow turned into joy [and their] mourning somersaulted into a holiday for parties and fun and laughter” (Esther 9:22 MSG).

## Q In what way does the theme of Esther reflect the theme of the entire Bible?

A 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 like 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 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, it is God who has the final say. He has a Joseph for every famine and a David for every Goliath. When his people need rescue, 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.

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## Q In what ways are the lies and confusion of Persia applicable to us today?

A The point of the first chapter of Esther is simply this: Persia is lying to you. Do we need the same reminder? The assignment given to the Jews has been passed on to us. God displays his glory and goodness through the Church. As we worship God, love our neighbors, and cherish our families, we become billboards of God's message.

We, too, are caretakers. Caretakers of the message of Jesus. He was born through the lineage of the Jews. Today, he is born through the lives of his saints. As you and I live out our faith, he is delivered into a faith-famished culture. We have the hope that this world needs. But sometimes we forget. Persia is lying to us. I don't mean to be blunt, but, then again, I do. Billion-dollar industries are conning to lure you into lifestyles that will leave you wounded and weary. How do God's people live in a godless society? Blend in and assimilate? No, this is the time to stand out and assist. We were made for this moment.

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## Q How do we face similar temptations as Mordecai and Esther regarding our identity in this world?

A Our society permits all beliefs, except an exclusive one. Do whatever you want as long as you applaud what everyone else does. The incontestable value of Western culture is tolerance. Ironically, the champions of tolerance are intolerant of a religion, like Christianity, that adheres to one Savior and one solution to the human problem. To believe in Jesus as the only redeemer is to incur the disdain of Persia.

In such moments, God's message is clear: Remember your name. "What marvelous love the Father has extended to us! Just look at it—we're called children of God! That's who we really are" (1 John 3:1 MSG). Do you know who you are? And whose you are? You are the presence of Jesus in this world--an eternal being, destined for an eternal home. Pimply-faced and gangly? Hogwash. You are a citizen of heaven. Unique in all of creation. Secured by Christ for eternity. The devil can't touch you. The demons can't have you. The world can't possess you. What people think about you matters not one whit. You belong to your heavenly Father.

## Q How did Esther find the courage to take on the role of moral leader for her people, determined to lead her people through a crisis?

A It had to be the straightforward message of Mordecai. Yes, the world is in a mess. Yes, we've fallen victim to a brutal Haman. But relief will come, and "who knows whether you have come into the kingdom for such a time as this?" Mordecai opened a window and shed a divine light into Esther's world. "You are here for a reason," he said. "Your life is part of a plan. You were placed here on purpose for a purpose."

So were you, my friend. You, like Esther, were made for this moment. To be clear, you didn't ask for this struggle. You want to get past it. You don't know how much longer you can hold up. But what if God is in this? Did he not place you on this planet in this generation? He determined your birthdate, nationality, and selected your neighborhood (see Acts 17:26). What if you, like Esther, have an opportunity to act in a way that will bless more people than you could imagine? This is your hour. This is your moment. You were made to stand up like Mordecai, to speak up like Esther. Deliverance will come. God will have his victory. He will rescue his people. He will right the wrongs of this world. The question is not, Will God prevail? The question is, Will you be part of the team?

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## Q How does the story of Esther guide us to use prayer when facing our own challenges?

A The moment you bow your head to pray is the moment God lifts his hand to help.

Your heavenly Father wants to hear from you. Desperate? Without options? Without solutions? By no means. Now, more than ever, is the time to get down on your knees and plead for mercy. Esther could have remained hidden and done nothing. Or, she could have rushed into the presence of Xerxes. But she chose the wiser recourse. She chose prayer. Her story urges us to do the same. This is the time for a no-nonsense, honest, face-on-the-floor talk with the Lord of All. Garments need not be ripped, but veneer must be removed. Three days of fasting is optional, but the prayer of genuine humility is not. What is your version of Xerxes? What Haman-sized challenge are you facing? Is your job in jeopardy? Is your loved one in hospice? Is your family under attack? Is your faith in tatters? Retreat into your prayer closet. The queen could enter the throne room of Xerxes because she had spent time in throne room of God. The same is true in your story and mine. Once we've spoken to the king of heaven, we are ready to face any king on earth.

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## Q What encouragement can we get from how Mordecai's life is saved?

A The next time you hear someone say, "the devil is in the details," correct them. God is in the details. He works in the small moments. The insignificant becomes significant because he is ever orchestrating the day-to-day details of innumerable lives through millennia of time to do what he has foreordained to do. Assume that God is at work. Move forward as if God is moving forward in your life. Give no quarter to the voices of doubt and fear. Don't cower to the struggle. You can't see God's hand? Can't make sense of his ways? That's ok. Obey what you know to do and be patient for what you don't. "Those who wait on the Lord shall renew their strength" (Is.40:31 NKJV). When the world seems off the rails, hold fast to this truth: butterfly wings don't determine the course of history. God does. He did in the days of Esther. He still does today.

## Q How is the grand plot twist in Esther's story reveals a powerful characteristic of God?

A In God's hands no script is predictable, no storyline is inevitable, no outcome is certain. He is ever a turn of the page from a turn-on-a dime turnaround. For heaven's sake, look in the Bethlehem barn. Who saw this coming? Or, better asked, who saw him coming? God, sleeping in a feed trough, still moist from Mary's womb. He held the universe in one moment, squeezed Mary's pinkie the next. He is the God of grand reversals.

The greatest reversal occurred in a cemetery outside of Jerusalem. Jesus the Christ was Jesus the corpse. No pulse. No breath. No hope. Wrapped tighter than an Egyptian mummy; three days dead in a borrowed tomb. His enemies raised a toast to a dead Messiah. Who's to say he doesn't have a reversal in your future? Don't let the middle of the story confuse you. Don't be thrown off by the prosperity of the wicked or the seeming success of the Hamans of the world. Instead, set your eyes on the author of your salvation

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## Q Why does the story of Esther end with a call to remember?

A Just as Christians read the story of the birth of Christ at Christmas, the Jews read the story of Esther during the feast of Purim. The holiday is to be commemorated after the scheduled day of execution, a reminder that the day is come and gone, and the Jews are still standing. We tend to forget. We tend to forget that God is for us, not against us. That God is near us, not away from us. That God is busy, not sleepy. Do we not suffer from spiritual amnesia? We tend to forget that God can make beauty out of ashes, joy out of mourning, an army out of a valley of dead bones, and rejoicing out of sorrow. We need memorials that jog our memory.

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## Q Can we trust that God is able to defeat our own challenges today?

A Nothing is too hard for the Lord. You must start here.

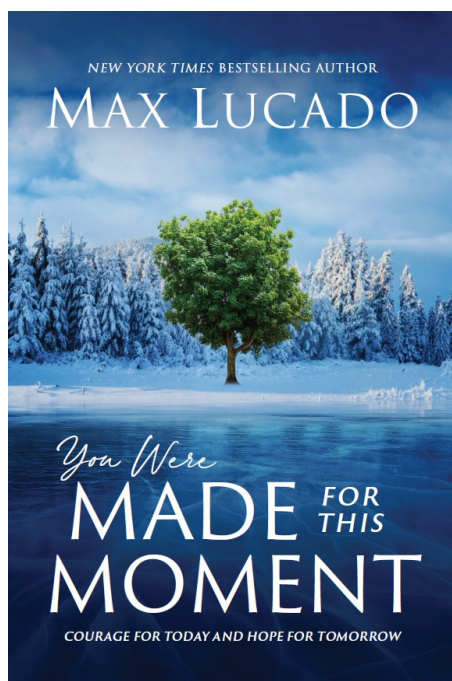
Don't measure the height of the mountain. Ponder the power of the one who made it. Don't tell God how big your storm is. Tell the storm how big your God is. Your problem is not that your problem is so big, but that your view of God is too small. Meditate less on the mess and more on the master. Less on the problems and more on his power.

Sometimes I wonder if the church has forgotten the vastness of God. Visit a congregation on a given Sunday, and you'll likely find a group of people sitting in comfortable chairs, hearing a comforting message about a God who keeps us comfortable. Do we know him before whom we gather? Do we understand that demons fear and flee at the sound of his name? That angels have been singing holy, holy, holy since creation, and still haven't sung it often enough? That a glimpse of God's glory caused Isaiah, the prophet, to beg for grace, and Moses, the patriarch, to duck under the protection of a rock? Do we comprehend his grandeur? His glory, fire, and power? If we did, we'd likely enter the sanctuary wearing helmets and body armor. Are we suffering from a loss of awe? And if we are, what are the consequences? Here's what I think. A wimpy God makes for a wimpy heart. But a great God makes for a solid saint. Let him be big.

## Q How can we let our seasons of struggle turn us into Esthers and Mordecai's?

A Seasons of struggle can be a treacherous time for the human heart. We are sitting ducks for despair and defeat. We turn away from others, turn our backs on God, and turn into fearful, cynical souls. Despair can be a dangerous season. But it can also be a developing time, a time in which we learn to trust God, to lean into his Word and rely on his ways.

The choice is ours. To help us choose the wise path, God gave the wonderfully wild story of Esther. It seems to me that the entire world is in a state of trauma. People do not know why they were born or to where they are destined. This is the age of much know-how and very little know-why. The invisible enemy of sin and secularism has left us dazed and bewildered. The world needs you! We need people with the resolve of Mordecai and the courage of Esther. The world is in desperate need for a people of God who will stay steady in the chaos.



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### *You Were Made for This Moment: Courage for Today and Hope for Tomorrow*

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