

Series: Making Changes

January 21, 2018

Title: Transformation

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Text: Esther 5-7

Life Puzzles!

“Puzzle”

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Sometime in the 1590s the English language gave the world a new word. The new word was originally spelled “*pusle*,” and it meant “to perplex, bewilder or confound.” Eventually its spelling changed to “*puzzle*.”

A few years later the verb “*puzzle*” became a noun, meaning something that is difficult to understand or make sense of. In 1760 an engraver and mapmaker named John Spilsbury glued a map of Europe onto a piece of wood, then cut out all of the different countries, creating the world’s first jigsaw puzzle.

Solving the puzzle:

We’ve probably all worked on a big jigsaw puzzle at one time or another. On the front of the box is a picture: the very picture that you will create once you’ve put the puzzle together. You dump out the 1000 puzzle pieces, turn them right-side up, and get to work.

No matter how hopeless or confusing it may seem, you have all you need to solve the puzzle. The picture on the box shows you what you’re working toward. Every little piece makes up a tiny part of that same picture. Your job is to find out how they all fit together.

There are no shortcuts to solving a jigsaw puzzle! You have to experiment, look for patterns, and try different arrangements of the pieces, until they fit correctly. For a while, all you have to show for your efforts are little “islands” of the complete picture: a cloud, half a tree, a mountain top. But one by one the parts of the picture come together until the moment when you fit in the final piece. Puzzle solved.

Life Puzzles:

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Sometimes life presents us with its own version of the 1000 piece puzzle. But instead of coming in a box with a glossy picture on the front, we may only have a fleeting glimpse or vague impression of the final picture. The 1000 pieces represent the bits and pieces of our lives and relationships, our circumstances and abilities. They may have all been arranged in a perfectly suitable picture, but now they are jumbled up and dumped out on the table in front of us.

In order to move forward in our life, we must have a vision of the new picture of who we are going to be. Then we must take the pieces and put them together to make that new picture. The word for this process of discovering and embracing a new identity is *Transformation*. Transformation doesn't happen all at once. It happens *one insight at a time* as we assemble the old, familiar bits and pieces of ourselves and our world to make a brand new identity.

Daunting? Absolutely. The Good News is that we are not alone in the process! God has promised to be present with us through His Spirit every step of the way. He promises to show us as much of the final picture as we need at any given moment. He helps us think "outside of the box" to discover how the pieces fit together. And He won't give up on us until the picture is complete, and we have "*put on the new self, which is being renewed in knowledge in the image of its Creator.*" (Colossians 3:10).

What does this process look like? Watch as Queen Esther allows God to use her to step into a brand new identity.

Queen Esther

All the wrong pieces?

Esther's cousin Mordecai had a vision of God rescuing His people, and of that rescue coming through the actions of none other than Queen Esther. But when Esther dumped the pieces of the puzzle on the table, Mordecai's vision seemed impossible.

First there was the puzzle piece called King Xerxes. He held all the power in the realm. Whatever he commanded could never be rescinded. And he had been duped into commanding that the Jews be exterminated on a given day.

Then there was the puzzle piece called Haman. Haman had been promoted to become Xerxes' right hand man. He had a personal grudge against Mordecai, and was determined to kill not only Mordecai, but the entire Jewish race.

Then there was the puzzle piece of being queen. Esther may have had a crown on her head, but she had no rights or power. She served at the king's bidding. To even approach the king uninvited meant certain death, unless the king held out his scepter. Hadn't her predecessor been deposed for now coming to dinner? So what could she do, when the two most powerful people in her life were agreed that the Jews must die?

Two Banquets

Esther decided to put all three puzzle pieces together, but to do so in a totally unexpected way. First, she asked all the Jews in Susa to fast and pray. Then she risked the death sentence by going uninvited to the king:

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Esther 5:1-2 NIV

On the third day Esther put on her royal robes and stood in the inner court of the palace, in front of the king's hall. The king was sitting on his royal throne in the hall, facing the entrance.

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When he saw Queen Esther standing in the court, he was pleased with her and held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand. So Esther approached and touched the tip of the scepter.

The king asked her what she wanted. Her answer: "Come to a banquet that I have prepared for you and Haman."

At the banquet she made her second request:

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Esther 5:8 NIV

"If the king regards me with favor and if it pleases the king to grant my petition and fulfill my request, let the king and Haman come tomorrow to the banquet I will prepare for them. Then I will answer the king's question."

A new arrangement in the making:

Esther brought the two most dangerous men in her life together at her own invitation. In other words, she *rearranged* the pieces so that they would make a different picture.

Her two banquets created suspense and anticipation in the heart of King Xerxes, her husband. Haman became inflated with a sense of his own power and importance. As a result, he rushed out to arrange for Mordecai's execution.

Meanwhile, God was at work. Xerxes couldn't get to sleep that night, so he ordered a reading of the chronicles of his reign.

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Esther 6:2 NIV

It was found recorded there that Mordecai had exposed Bigthana and Teresh, two of the king's officers who guarded the doorway, who had conspired to assassinate King Xerxes.

Xerxes realized that Mordecai had never been honored or rewarded for his act of heroism. The next morning he called in Haman and asked him what should be done for someone the king wanted to honor. Haman had been preparing to ask permission to execute Mordecai. Now, he thought:

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Esther 6:6b NIV

Now Haman thought to himself, "Who is there that the king would rather honor than me?"

Esther's flattery had done its work. He suggested a royal procession for the honored person.

He was utterly unprepared for what came next: a command from the king to lead just such a procession – for Mordecai!

The puzzle pieces were fitting together to make a totally different story from the one Haman had imagined.

Transformation

The third request:

It was at the second banquet that Esther made her third request:

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Esther 7:3-4 NIV

Then Queen Esther answered, "If I have found favor with you, Your Majesty, and if it pleases you, grant me my life – this is my petition. And spare my people – this is my request."

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For I and my people have been sold to be destroyed, killed and annihilated. If we had merely been sold as male and female slaves, I would have kept quiet, because no such distress would justify disturbing the king."

The king responded with outrage:

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Esther 7:5-6 NIV

King Xerxes asked Queen Esther, "Who is he? Where is he – the man who has dared to do such a thing?"

Esther said, "An adversary and enemy! This vile Haman!"

The king left the room in a rage, and when he came back, Haman was falling on Esther's couch to plead for his life.

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Esther 7:8 NIV

The king exclaimed, "Will he even molest the queen while she is with me in the house?"

End of story for Haman. He was put to death that very day on the pole he had erected for Mordecai.

Esther's Transformation:

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When Esther agrees to risk her life to save her people, she begins to experience a radical transformation. Instead of being a victim of Haman's plot to kill the Jews, she becomes the primary actor in their rescue. In fact, her decisions and her strategy drive the entire story from that point forward.

Esther steps into a new identity. She leaves behind her fears and self-interest. She reveals her Jewish identity in the face of a royal edict that the Jews be killed! And she brings together the king and her enemy in such a way as to disarm them and set the stage for justice to be served.

It doesn't happen all at once. She lets the pieces fit together one by one. She takes the ultimate risk, burning her bridges behind her. And most of all, she puts her trust in God's promise to protect and rescue her people. Thanks to her own personal transformation, God's people are saved. Without her, we would not be here celebrating and worshiping the very Jewish Son of God, Jesus of Nazareth!

Your Transformation:

A few weeks ago I asked you to write on a piece of paper the big change or challenge that you are facing in your life right now. Perhaps you have a glimpse of what you will be like when this challenge has been met. On the other hand, you may feel like you're putting together a puzzle with no idea of what it's supposed to look like!

Whatever the case, God *knows* what the new you looks like! And He has put all the pieces you need in the box, even the ones that don't seem to belong. Be patient. The change you need will come one puzzle piece at a time – one insight at a time.

With God, problems become possibilities; obstacles become opportunities. He is at your side to help you see yourself and your situation in a whole new way. And He will do His work of transformation in your life.

But only if you are willing to work on the puzzle.