

Time of Grace Ministry  
**Am I Worthy of Thanks?**  
Esther Chapter 4  
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You may have never heard of a man named, Stanislav Petrov. Anyone ever hear of Stanislav Petrov? No? But you ought to be thankful for him. Stanislav Petrov, he died just a couple of years ago, but back in 1983, you got to go back a ways, he was the lieutenant colonel for the Soviet Air Defense Forces. His job was basically to sit in a secret underground bunker outside the city of Moscow, watch the satellite and the radar in front of him, and let his superiors know if he happened to see anything. If he happened to see anybody attacking the Soviet Union. Back in 1983, if you were around back in 1983, you may remember that 1983 is the year that President Reagan called the Soviet Union the "Evil Empire," not a term of endearment. 1983 was also the year that the Soviet Union shot down an airplane that was travelling from the United States to Paris, killing 269 people. And so, basically, his job, really, was to sit in that underground bunker and watch the satellite and the radar traffic to see, in particular, if the United States was going to be attacking Russia. And then, one early morning in September of 1983, he thought that that's what was happening. Shortly after midnight, the alarms started going off in his underground bunker while he was on the clock, and he looked at the satellite, and one of the satellites from outer space showed that there were five missiles that had been launched from the west coast of the United States over to Russia, and they were on their way.

Now, the job of Stanislav Petrov was simply to report what he saw to his superiors, to tell them what was going on, so that they could take decisive action with the information that they were given. Except, he didn't quite know immediately what he was going to tell them because he hoped that it was a false alarm. In fact, he thought that it might be a false alarm and for two reasons. Reason number one is because he thought that if the United States really was going to attack Russia, they wouldn't use just five missiles, that they would use abundantly more, that they would go all out if they were really going to do a surprise attack on a country that they weren't exactly on good terms with at the moment. He thought it was a little bit strange that there were only five. And secondly, the second reason he hoped and thought that it might be a false alarm is because while the satellites up in space, they identified the five missiles going from the west coast over to Russia, the radar on the ground was showing absolutely nothing, and he thought that was a little bit strange too, but the clock was ticking, and he only had 15 minutes to make his decision as to what he was going to tell his superiors.

And what he was going to tell his superiors was incredibly significant because if he reports it as a false alarm, well, if it turns out to be false, then that's great, then he probably saves the world, spares the world from World War III taking place back in 1983. If he reports it as something that is actually happening, as something that was going on right now, that these are real missiles on their way to a real place in Russia, then Russia wasn't going to wait until those missiles landed

before they would retaliate. They would respond back with everything in their full arsenal, and they would let loose on the United States in a way that would leave no doubt that Russia was superior to the United States. But if he reported it as a false alarm, and it turned out to be true, well, then he knew that the lives of the people he loved and that his own life would be in incredible danger, and his country would be hit beyond anybody's ability to repair it very easily or quickly. And so, based on the fact that you might know that World War III did not take place in 1983, he reported it as a false alarm, which is exactly what it was.

Identify somebody in your life that has had a very significant impact on your existence, a very positive impact, a Stanislav Petrov type of impact on your existence. I'm going to encourage you to think of at least one person right now, put your head down until you think about them, and then lift your head back up after you've thought about them. So I know that everybody is set, go ahead and do that right now. And now also, in the spirit of Thanksgiving, as you're thinking about that individual, I would like you to take a moment to thank God for that person. The Bible reminds us that every good gift comes from our Father in heaven, so just take a moment right now and say a quick thank you prayer to our Heavenly Father who gifted you with a connection with that person.

My apologies if you're still praying, but now I'd like to ask you a question. Do you think if everybody in the world took a moment to do that same exercise, to identify somebody who's had a significant impact in their life, and to take a moment to thank God for that particular person, do you think anybody would have thanked God for you? I don't know what you're thinking, but I do know, in countless conversations with many different people over the course of my relatively short life, I know it's not unusual for somebody to wonder if their life is really that significant, if their life is really making any kind of difference in anybody else's life. And many don't wonder, they're convinced of it. They're convinced that it hasn't made that type of difference, that it doesn't make that kind of difference, and that it isn't making any kind of difference.

That's why we are going to be in the Book of Esther today as we celebrate Thanksgiving, because the Book of Esther allows us to say something different to anybody who believes that about their life. You may know that the Book of Esther is an account of a Jewish woman named Esther, who became the queen of Persia by winning a beauty competition. She didn't see that coming, but she became the queen of Persia by winning a beauty competition. The king of Persia, at the time, didn't know that she was Jewish, and that's incredibly significant because in the chapters leading up to the section that we'll be reading through this morning from Esther 4, the king of Persia made a decree that all the Jewish people in his nation were going to be killed. And that wasn't a false alarm, it really was going to happen.

And as word started spreading, the news of what was going to happen to the Jewish nation reached another Jewish person, a cousin of Esther named Mordecai. And Mordecai, recognizing the position that his cousin Esther was in, sent word to her and suggested "Esther, maybe because of the position you're in, you have an opportunity to do something about this. Esther, why don't you go to the king, and why don't you let him know something that he doesn't know about you apparently, that you are Jewish, point out that he just accidentally ordered the murder of the queen, and nicely and politely ask him to change his mind."

Sounds like a good thing to do, but Esther didn't want to do it. Not because she didn't love her people, not because she didn't love her heritage, not because she didn't care about her life, but because she believed, apparently, that just little Esther can't possibly be that significant. Esther 4 goes like this. It says, "When Esther's words were reported to Mordecai," the words that she was, at the very least, hesitant to go and try to this out, "he sent back this answer: 'Do not think that because you are in the king's house you alone of all the Jews will escape. For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father's family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?' Then Esther sent this reply to Mordecai: 'Go, gather together all the Jews who are in Susa, and fast for me. Do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my attendants will fast as you do. When this is done, I will go to the king, even though it is against the law. And if I perish, I perish.'"

You know, it's notable, something that Esther said there to Mordecai. She said that it was against the law for her to go to the king even though she was the queen, and it was. The only way that anyone would be able to go to see the king of Persia in those days was if the king summoned you officially, and Esther hadn't been summoned, even though she was the queen, she didn't have the ability to just go and talk to the king. And typically back then, the way that it worked is that if you went to the king and tried to say something to him, and if he didn't like what you had to say, then very often the king would just order your annihilation, even if you happened to be the queen, and that was a position that Esther did not want to be in. And that's significant because I think one of the reasons we are so often tempted to believe that our lives aren't very significant, that we can't be much of anything, is because we look at the situations that we're in, we look at what's going on in our world, and it's not exactly the position that we want to be in.

You know, we look around, and we think, "Well, by now, my life was supposed to be a little bit different than it's turned out to be. I was supposed to be a little bit happier by now, I was supposed to be a little bit more comfortable, I was supposed to be a little bit more settled, I was supposed to be a little bit safer, a little bit more satisfied in my work or in relationships, but because that's not where I am right now, because it's so different than where I thought I would be, so different than what I wanted to have happen right now, that must be an indicator that I'm doing something wrong in my life. And if I'm doing something wrong in my life, that means that I can't possibly be in any kind of significant position to make any kind of possible change."

You know, when Mordecai said, "You know, who knows? That maybe you have been placed in this royal position so that you could have a significant and unique impact in this world and an intentional one that somebody has in mind just for you." In other words, "Maybe the fact, Esther, that you are in a situation that you never would have planned for yourself, means that you're not really in control of your life. And maybe, Esther, maybe that's a good thing." In fact, if it were up to Esther at all, Esther would not have been in the situation that she would have been. As a Jewish woman, she never would have moved to Persia, she never would have entered a Persian beauty competition, she certainly never would have won, and then never would have been in position where, spoiler alert if you haven't read the rest of the Book of Esther, where she was able to save her entire nation. Things would have been much different, and you could easily

argue, much worse if Esther were the one who was in control of how her life went. Another way to say that is she didn't need to be in control of her life in order for things to turn out alright.

And quite frankly, we don't have as much control over our lives as we like to imagine. We have control over many things, we make a lot of decisions every day like how to act, and how to react to the different people around us. We decide what words we're going to use, and we decide where to go to spend our money, where to spend our time, who we spend our time with, all those different things. But so far, our best collective effort as humanity has only resulted in a world that I think is horribly painful and horribly broken. We look around and we see how many marriages that are just mediocre at best, children who are disobedient, minorities who are marginalized, and cities that are overrun by crime. And then there's you and me, who despite our best efforts every day, we try to close our eyes at night, and, well, is it easy or difficult for you to feel guilty about something? We don't have as much control over our lives as we would really like.

My grandmother once shared a story with me about a time that she learned that lesson in a memorable way. It was the winter of 1952. She was pregnant with my father at the time and it was January or February, and they were visiting some relatives in the Wisconsin town of Two Creeks, or as they say in Wisconsin, "Two Cricks." But Two Creeks is about 30 miles of farm fields from where they happened to be living at the time. And while they were visiting their relatives, the snow started gently falling, and once they saw the snow falling, my grandma and my grandpa thought maybe we should get in the car and drive home before the roads get too bad. So, that's what they decided to do. They got into the car, my grandpa in the driver's seat, my grandmother in the passenger seat, with my dad tucked comfortably in her womb, and my dad's oldest sister sitting on grandma's lap. I mean, that's just the way they did it back in 1952; no seatbelts, no car seats, nothing like that. And off they went into the gently falling snow which didn't remain gently falling snow for very long, it turned into a driving blizzard. Blinding, blinding snow in every direction, and they tried to make their way through it. But the wind was so strong that eventually their car slid off the road and went down into a ditch out in the middle of nowhere, and they were stuck.

And my grandpa, at that moment, decided to do what they tell you not to do nowadays if that type of thing happens. He decided to look at his wife and his children in the car, decided to leave them. He said, "I'm going to go out and look for help," and he did. He got out of the car, and he left his wife and his kids behind, and he started walking down the road. And it didn't take very long at all before my grandmother could not see her husband anymore because the snow was blocking the way. She doesn't know for how long she was sitting in that car, wondering if anyone was really ever going to see them alive again, when suddenly, the back door of the car opened and a man fell into the backseat, and the door slammed behind him. But it wasn't my grandpa, it was Rudy.

Rudy was my grandmother's sister's father-in-law. Rudy had been driving home from work on that same road, at that same time, during that same storm, when he also lost control of his car and ended up sliding off the road and getting stuck down in the ditch. He also decided to do the same thing that my grandfather decided to do. He got out of his car and start walking to look for help.

But he had been walking for so long and was so cold that my grandma was convinced that he was just one breath away from death when he fell into the backseat of the car that was there. It was warmer in there than it had been outside, and so, he breathed again, and again, and again. Before too much time had gone by, my grandfather returned with a local farmer that had fired up his biggest tractor and drove it down the road to them. He hooked it up to the car, pulled them out of the ditch, and set them free so that they could all eventually get home safely. But that was a situation that none of them saw coming.

You know, Rudy had no idea that that car was going to be there, and certainly, no idea who was going to be inside of it as he pulled on the handle. My grandpa and my grandma had no idea that Rudy was going to be wandering on that road needing to be saved, and yet, they were still in a position to save him. They saved him, in a sense, by accident which is the same thing you could say, in a similar way, about Esther. That she was in her position by accident. She didn't plan for that to happen, and she needed some help recognizing that that was the situation that she was in. She ended up saving her people, basically, by accident, which is never how God works.

God saved you on purpose. He saved you on purpose, and he knew exactly where you were. And the details of our life might be surprises to us on any given day, but they're never surprises to God. Jesus knows exactly where you are on any given day. He knows exactly right where you are, and he also knows what goes on in our hearts at those moments. He knows how often we'd rather be God and control everything instead of trust God and lean on his promises. He knows how often we go through life being led by fear instead of by faith. He knows how often we wait until the very, very last moment until we're desperate and cry out to him.

He knows, and still, he chose to drive himself into something far more dangerous than a snowstorm. He chose to drive himself to the hell of his own execution, where we not only see that God also knows how it feels to be in a very undesired situation, but where we clearly see that you and I were entirely forgiven of all the things that would get in the way of God taking us to the very best location of all. The one where every tear is wiped away in perfection, the one where you never have to say goodbye to anybody you love ever again, the one where you'll never worry or be discouraged about anything, the one where you'll never again have to brace yourself for bad news that you hoped would never be coming.

Whatever the details of your life right now, we already know the ending. It ends with your heart and your whole being smiling, and not because of your great ability to control exactly how things go from here on out. But simply because the God who was thinking about you on the day of your creation was also thinking about you at the cross, just as he was thinking about you on the day in which he spoke every one of his loving promises because he knew you would need to hear them so often. He thinks about you as he decides where to send his angels every single day. He thinks about you as you close your eyes at night while he always stays awake. You make an impact on God's existence day by day by day which is why we know that what Mordecai suggested might be true for Esther, that maybe, somebody else was in control of your life, "Maybe it's not an accident that you are exactly where you are."

We get to say that for certain about our lives, and this isn't the only place in the Bible where we see it. "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord," it says in Jeremiah 29, "Plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." And we know the Apostle Paul, says in Romans 8 that "In all things," even the hard things, "God works for the good of those who love him." In Acts 17, the Apostle Paul, was giving a speech in the city of Athens in which he reminded them that God not only knows the exact places where you will live, but he determines them, and the exact places that you will call home. He even tells us why. Not so that more and more people can see your significance, but so that you and I would be in unique positions compared to any other person on earth to be able to help others see God.

Earlier, when I asked you to think about one person who's had a significant impact on your life, any time I ask somebody to do that, it's not difficult for me to think of five people. I can easily think of five people in my life who've had incredibly, monumental, significant impact on my life. I bet you don't know a single one of them. They're not famous by any means, but they are to me. But the one thing that each of them has in common is that as I look at their life and as I think about their life, something was obvious. They were thankful to God, they lived like they knew they had reasons to be thankful to God, and it showed up in a wide variety of ways. That was it, that was the impact they made. They were thankful to God, they lived lives of thanks. Three of them are no longer here, three of them are already enjoying the perfection of heaven. But their impact on my heart is still significant which reminds us of two things related to our lives: number one, our time to impact one another's lives down here on earth, it's limited; and number two, the impact that we make though is everlasting.

Even my friends in heaven, every time I think about them, it brings joy to my heart, it reminds me to thank God. It's easy for me to think of them and thank God. Seize those moments my friends. Seize those moments to give thanks to the God who is always thinking about your significance to him so that so many others can also see how significant they are to a God who's always good to His children. Let's pray.

Father in heaven, you are so, so good. Every gift that you give us through our Savior, Jesus, is not only good, it's perfect, and it's all for our benefit. By his pain, by his wounds, by his blood, we are healed, we are forgiven, we are your perfect children in Christ. That will never change, that will always be true.

We thank you, God, for you are good in giving us those things. We thank you, God, for you are good in also giving us opportunities to highlight your goodness to the people around us. Every one of us is in a very unique position in life. There is no one else that is standing exactly where each of us is and that's intentional on your part. You created each of us to have a significant impact on this world and a unique impact on the lives of those around us.

Help us to make the greatest impact of all, to live by faith in you so that those around us can see the God that we are blessed to have faith in. We give thanks to you, dear God, for you are always good, in Jesus' name, we pray. Amen. And all God's people said, amen.