

Season 3, Episode 5: God's People Fall (Chapter 4) With Nana Dolce

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Felicity: This podcast is sponsored by 10ofthose.com. 10ofthose.com handpick the best Christian books that point to Jesus and sell them at discounted prices. I've been really enjoying reading a book called The Glories of God's Love. In fact, in the US. It's it's called the Gospel Primer. It's just got a different title in both countries. And I don't know about you, but I find that I'm a bit forgetful in life and it's no different with the Gospel. And this book reminds us of what God has done, why he did it and how it impacts our everyday lives. And the best thing is, it short chapters, these kind of beautiful little paragraphs that are just like post it notes or little notes that remind you of these glorious gospel things. Perfect for pointing out to Jesus in the morning in a snatched moment. Before we go to sleep, pick up a copy at 10ofthose.com

Sarah: Welcome to two sisters in a cup of tea. My name is Sarah and I live in the UK. And this is my sister Felicity and she lives in the US.

Felicity: Hello, everyone.

Sarah: And this with us this week is Nana Dolce. Nana, we're so excited that you can join us on this week's episode. Why don't you introduce yourself? Tell us a bit about who you are, your family and what you get up to during the day.

Nana: Well, thank you both so much for the pleasure of joining you. So, yes, my name is Nanadolce. I am a wife to Eric and a mom and a member of our local church here, where my husband is on staff. My days are spent home schooling my children. I also work for the Charles Simeon Trust. It's a ministry that trains Bible teachers to teach what the scriptures set as to grow in expeditious teaching and passwork. And I'm trying to think what else I do. I work for homeschool my children and I write as well.

Felicity: It's a fair amount. I think we could say that there's a lot going on.

Sarah: Another very significant question into that mix is, do you like drinking tea, Nana?

Nana: Oh, I do. Yes.

Sarah: Oh, very good, very good.

Nana: I grew up eating digestive, actually, in Ghana, so it's very nostalgic and I always enjoy a digestive biscuit.

Felicity: That's a classy biscuit as well, I think, digestive, you know, touching the hobnob.

Sarah: It's a classic, isn't it? It's a simple classic. You can't beat it, really.

Felicity: What have you got going on, Sarah, in your?

Sarah: I've got a normal tea today, but I've got a lotus biscuff biscuit today.

Felicity: What they would call a coffee biscuit over here, I think.

Sarah: Oh, is it? It does say every coffee wants a lotus biscuits, but lotus biscuff, yes, it does. On the packet. I don't like coffee there's.

Felicity: Quite nice, right?

Sarah: Oh, yeah.

Felicity: I've got an amazing one. A friend very kindly brought me round a single biscuit in a sealable plastic thing, and it's a Marks and Spencer's roundlee, which is like shock goodness. She'd just been back to England and brought this kind of gift. It was a special moment.

Sarah: Oh, very good. Now that you just mentioned casually that you're writing a book at the moment, can you tell us a bit more about what that book is?

Nana: Absolutely. So I am excited to be writing a book for ten of those. I'm still writing it. I submitting my manuscript very soon. And so what this book does is it looks at women, specifically in the Old Testament, and it walks through redemptive history looking at the narratives of these women. And the question is, how can we see Jesus in their narratives? How can they point us to Jesus? And how can we tell the story of the Old Testament looking at the narratives of women? And so the foundation for the book is coming from

Luke 24, where Jesus, with the disciples headed to Emmaus, tells them that all the all of Moses and the prophets and the Scriptures point to him. If so, read the narratives in the Old Testament, including those of women, to see how they point us to Jesus. And so that's what this book sets out to do.

Felicity: Wow. Sounds wonderful. It sounds exactly what we need to be thinking about. I love that. The idea that considering how the women point us to Jesus, because that's not an obvious kind of narrative, is it, that we talk about very much, but actually how evident it is throughout the whole Bible.

Nana: Absolutely.

Sarah: Well, we can't wait to hear more from what you think about chapter four today, which is what we're delving into. Felicity, do you want to read the chapter for us?

Felicity: Yes, absolutely.

Nana: So.

Sarah: Esther.

Felicity: Chapter four. When Mordecai learned of all that had been done, he tore his clothes, put on sackcloth and ashes, and went out into the city, wailing loudly and bitterly. But he went only as far as the king's gate, because no one clothed in sackcloth was allowed to enter it. In every province to which the edicts and order of the king came, there was great mourning among the Jews. With fasting and weeping and wailing, many lay in sackcloth and ashes. When Esther's eunuchs and female attendants came and told her about Mordecai, she was in great distress. She sent clothes for him to put on instead of his sackcloth, but he would not accept them. Then Esther summoned Hathag, one of the king's units assigned to attend to her, and ordered him to find out what was troubling Mordecai and why. So Hathag went out to Mordecai in the open square of the city in front of the king's gate. Mordecai told him everything that had happened to him, including the exact amount of money Haman had promised to pay into the royal treasury for the destruction of the Jews. He also gave him a copy of the text of the edict for their annihilation, which had been published in Susa to show to Esther and to explain to her. And he told him to instruct her to go into the king's presence to beg for mercy and plead with him for her people. Hathag went back and reported to Esther what Mordecai had said. Then she instructed him to say to Mordecai all the king's officials and the people of the royal provinces know that for any man or woman who approaches the king and the inner court without being summoned, the king has but one law that they be put to death unless the king extends the gold scepter to them and spares their lives. But 30 days have passed since I called to go to the king. Mordecai's words were reported in Susa. 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. Mordecai went away and carried out all of Esther's instructions.

Sarah: Thank you, Christie. I forgot to say before that because we got Nana on with us this week, we're going to take 30 minutes, half an hour stage just so we get the most out of our chat time altogether today. What a great chapter. There's so much in here, isn't there? Any initial reflections as we get into it?

Felicity: What is it worth just saying what's happened before, just in case anyone is dropping in at this point? So there's been this Haman the Baddie has been plotting to destroy not just Mordecai who's irked him, but actually the whole Jewish people. And we've got this kind of ancient embassy, haven't we, between Haman's people and more Persians' people, God's people. And so this is where the last verse of the chapter before was just absolute chaos because the people, the Jews, are just in absolute horror that this is going to happen. And it seems that there's just an apparently inescapable threat of destruction of God's people. And so I thought when you then get into this chapter, Mordecai's response is just it's so extreme in some ways, isn't it? It feels quite different to the Mordecai that we've encountered previously. When I've been kind of imagining

Mordecai before, I felt he's just quite a considered man. He's not very open about where he's come from, about his background, his ancestry. And here, in response to this news of the destruction of his people. He is visibly mourning his clothing, his demeanor. Everything about him is reflecting what's going on.

Sarah: Yeah, it's hugely significant, that, isn't it? It's really obvious how morning. I think what's interesting about this chapter is that you get, like, that wailing in the morning and the really sobering kind of mood that's going on. But there's also a bit of comedy going on in there, because basically, Mordecai and Esther never actually speak face to face. There's this runner going in between them at every point in their conversation. This man called Hafac, he's the one who's, like, relaying every part of the conversation. You could have just been forced to imagine what's going on there for him. And this kind of comedy situation, it's not comedy. So it's really serious, isn't it? But I think it took me a few times of reading and listening to it to realize they're not speaking face to face. There's someone going in between here. It's really interesting, isn't it?

Felicity: Yeah. I wonder that it may be shows a bit as well of Esther characteristic of the palace, isn't it? So there's always other people involved in palatial things. Like, it's never just the king making a decision. He has a zillion advisors. So Esther seems to be very much in that world at this point, to the extent she has no idea about what's happened, which seems crazy, doesn't it, when the whole city and the provinces are in uproar about what's going she's like, what, do you need some more clothes, Mordecai? Have you run out of clothes? Like what? She just seems to have missed it, I wonder, because she is kind of just swept up into this other world, and so the separation between those two seems quite obvious.

Sarah: What struck you now as you were reading it to me?

Nana: Yes. So I think that what Felicity mentioned is something that struck me. So just the sense of mourning and grief after. What I noticed is that we've been used to a lot of feasting in Esther so far, and yet this is a chapter of fasting. So the contrast between the elaborate sort of feasting that begins the book and will end the book as well, and then this part of warning and sack cloth and Fasting, I think, emphasizes how big of a deal this edict was. And actually, it is quite big when you remember that we've seen similar edicts like this before throughout the story of Scripture. Heavenly. So when a king puts out an order to kill God's people, like, we saw it with Pharaoh, the sons of Israel, we even saw it with Ethelia, who in Second Kings, wanted to kill the sons of David, the royal line. But this is the first time where it's not just a subset of the people. It's not just the boys or kings sons. This is everyone. This is men, women, children, to kill, annihilate, destroy. It's a pretty big deal. So it makes sense that the morning and the grease and the fasting is also such a big deal, I think. Yeah.

Felicity: That's so helpful. I haven't really made those connections with edicts previously. That is so helpful.

Sarah: Yeah.

Felicity: And I agree then. So then this is kind of it makes sense, doesn't it? And the emphasis annihilation, which is said even just twice in this passage, but throughout the book, just this emphatic, this is destruction. And I think that's part of what is so big about the chapter is the genuine peril that God's people are in. Because I think sometimes when you're reading a story, it's like, it's all going to be all right. It's going to be all right. But I think actually there's a genuine question at this point in the narrative as to whether it really is going to be all right. And it's not just is it going to be all right for Mordecai and Esther and their immediate family, but for the whole people. And in that is God's plan of salvation through a Messiah that comes out of this line of people, is that going to be flawed by what is going on here? So the proportions of what is at risk here is bigger than we might have originally thought.

Sarah: Yeah, we're getting really stuck into Esther as a narrative. Now, why is it important for us to zoom out and consider Jesus when we're getting really stuck into the details? Why is it important to do that? Can you just kind of shed some light on that for us?

Nana: Yeah, I mean, I think we do that because Scripture itself says that the interpretive center of the whole Bible is Jesus himself. So these are Jesus' own words. I may have mentioned Luke 24 before, where he tells disciples that all of this point to him. If so, as

Christian women studying the Bible, I think we study the Bible as Christians. When we look for how our passage connects us to Jesus. We want to do that because I think we risk the possibility of what a beautiful narrative this is masterfully written. It could become just an intellectual exercise of looking at this piece of literature, or it could become something where we even moralize Esther's in our generation. Or we may even miss the opportunity of if we miss Jesus in the Gospel, in our teaching of this to others, we may miss a chance to be evangelistic and to be thoughtful in pointing others to Jesus. And so it's always important to look for the Gospel, and we can find it because Jesus says he is there.

Felicity: That is so helpful to see that as the interpretive center, that is a normal thing to do. It's not like we're kind of plastering it on top and trying to make it fit, but this actually was the intention. This is how God intended it to be read. But how do we actually go about doing that? So you're making it sound really quite simple. So all I need to do is read this and then Jesus will pop out, and then it will be fine. And I can tell other people about it, and then it's all fine. So can you just give us some help on how we go about that, please?

Nana: You're right. It does take a bit of work, doesn't it? It does take a bit of work. And there are different ways to connect the passage you're studying to the gospel, depending on the genre you're studying. We won't rehearse all of that. But I think if you're in the Old Testament in particular, or if you're in Old Testament narrative looking for something that we call typology, very helpful. And actually that typology helped me to see Jesus in Esther four, using that tool and thinking about it really did help me to make that gospel connection. So I'll just say here that typology sounds like a big word. What is typology? But it's like an analogy. When you make an analogy, you make comparisons between two things. In biblical typology, what you're looking for is an object that shows up later on. But it's not just a one to one comparison. There's almost like a progression. Or especially if you're comparing someone or something to Jesus later on, you'll see that's an escalation and that Jesus fulfills it beyond what we see even initially in our passage. And I think when we're using typology to connect to the gospel, it's important that we see that, that we just don't do a onetoone connection, but ask the question of how Jesus is even better. Yeah, so typology is helpful and also something that we called historical trajectory. Again, it sounds like a big word, but it's really just knowing the story, knowing the big picture of the Bible. So being able to connect, maybe perhaps even asking yourself the question from creation to new creation, where is this story falling? Where is this sitting within that timeline? And how does this story, where does this relationship to what's already happened? And how does it move me forward to Jesus? How does it kind of unfold to the death and resurrection of Jesus? I think that is helpful to us as well when we're looking at Old Testament narratives making gospel connections.

Felicity: Yeah, really happy. So two sort of pronged, two tools to get us in there. Can you show us the typology in Esther? So you're saying that that's helped you to see it in action in Esther. Can you just walk us through how that works?

Nana: Yeah, so I think actually what we've already talked about sets that up very well. So we've talked about how this is such a dark chapter all the morning is because there's a real threat. There's a real danger here that God's people are facing, and also the threat to this promise that God himself has made of this coming deliverer. And if all of the people are annihilated, what happens to that promise? So there's a need for a deliverer and there's a need for a true savior here in this chapter. So what I love is Esther's willingness, right? So she comes forward and it's almost like I'm resigning myself to this task. If I perish, I perish. It's not a force. Mordecai doesn't threaten her or well, I guess maybe he doesn't in a little bit of a sense, there is a willingness as there is willing to be this rescuer. And so that actually reminded me thinking or comparing that with Jesus is his willingness to be the mediator. I actually thought of John. I want to make sure that I get my passage right. I thought of John, chapter ten, John 10:18, where Jesus himself says, no one takes it from me, speaking of his life, but I lay it down on my own accord. Willingness of our Lord to be the deliverer, to be the rescuer, the one who will mediate, go before the King for his people, in essence. And so even Esther's willingness to obey Mordecai reminds me of Philippians 2:8, where it talks about Jesus obey the Father even to the point of death. So I see that willing mediator as a sort of comparison, and I could leave it there. But I think that, again, biblical typology calls us to think of how there is a progression, how Jesus is even better

than Esther. And so here I am reminded of Mordecai tells Esther in verse 14. He says, if you keep silence at this time, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another place. In other words, God's rescue of his people will not ultimately be based on Esther's willingness. So God will do it whether Esther is willing or not. She is not the only she's not the ultimate hope for God. The Lord will use her, but she is not the ultimate hope. This is different in the case of Jesus. With Jesus, there is no other mediator, right? And we get that from what passage tells us. That tells us that there is one God and there is one mediator between God and man, the man Jesus. There's no other option. Jesus is our only hope. And so how glorious then was his willingness, his willingness to do only what he could do and rescue those people and being that mediator, being that substitute for us, right, the death that we deserve.

Felicity: I love that as we just begin to think it through and to see the types and then to see actually how it's even better. I can feel my kind of like wow factor just growing as you're talking. Jesus is esther points us, she shows us Jesus, but then an even better mediator, the one that we need and that we have, that God willingly gave us.

Sarah: It's kind of like it's a springboard, isn't it? As you can say all these different verses. It's springboard to see Jesus, but also then that feeds back into the narrative itself, doesn't it? Like, it feeds back into Esther, and it brings such richness to what you're reading, because you've got those foreshadows, haven't you? Got this gospel glimpses of what's going on. I think what really strikes me as well in this is the change of heart that Esther seems to have. There is a significant shift, isn't there, between not quite identifying with her people to okay fast for three days, three nights, and if I perish, I perish, but I will do this. And the God's providence in that, that it coincides with prayer, with fasting, with asking God's people to depend on Him and to shape history through that moment. I think it's really quite an extraordinary moment, isn't it, seeing that unfold in the chapter?

Nana: Yeah.

Felicity: And it does seem to be a bit of shift in her faith. Doesn't I wonder whether that's kind of growth in her trust that she maybe didn't have before, and at this point, then, actually there's a renewed trust in that Lord who does deliver and does save. Yeah.

Sarah: So, Nana, I can't believe times already running away with us. How do we drive this to our hearts? What are the implications? Like, what are the takeaways for our hearts and our actions as we can have closed in on Esther?

Nana: For I think seeing Jesus in this chapter, actually, or being able to point to the gospel and being able to see my Lord in this chapter warmed my heart. It helps to grow my affection for him. I love, I think, remembering the fact that the only way we could be rescued from the annihilation, the death, the just wrath, really, of God for our sins, the only way we could be rescued was this one mediator who was a willing one. That really warms my heart. So I love being able to read an Old Testament passage that grows my affection for Jesus. So, yeah, Esther Four helped me to worship, so it warmed my heart as I considered it. I think that's how I took it. I took this chapter to heart.

Sarah: I think that's so helpful as well. I think there is a danger with this chapter, isn't it, that we kind of spot those where's my moment of who knows at such a time as this is for me to stand up in this way? Yes, there might be some kind of small application in that, but actually, no, the big thing is, wow, our picture of Jesus is growing because we're reading this chapter and because we're delving into estimate. And that's the big takeaway, isn't it? I think how do we see more of Jesus, and how does that delight our heart?

Felicity: And I think as that happens, then our confidence in him grows as well. Out of affection comes a confidence that actually this is what God is doing, like this Jesus as our mediator, the one we need the one through whom God does deliver his people convinces me all the more to trust God and to grow in faith in that. And I think a confidence that we are on the right side of history as we trust this God, as we trust Jesus as our mediator. And I think for Esther at this time, she was in the Persian Empire, and it's feeling like maybe you're not on the right side of history, but she is. And for us, we're in a similar world in some ways, aren't we? It can feel like the power lies elsewhere and the deliverance will come from elsewhere. But actually, as we see Jesus more and more in this and our affection grows, so we're convinced this is where it is at, we're in the right spot as we run to Jesus, love Jesus, gaze on his glory, and trust Him more.

Nana: I think I agree with you, Felicity, that there is a sense also of trusting God and trusting his words and trusting his promises. Even Mordecai telling Esther, if you don't, there will still be deliverance. I think that that is an encouragement to remember the guy whose purposes prevail that he is. Zeresh seems to be this king whose word and whose edicts cannot change. But there's actually a greater king on a higher throne in this story, and he is the one whose purposes will prevail. He's the one who his promises will not change. And we can trust that. We can trust that wherever we are today and whatever we're going through and whatever might seem very difficult, we can trust this God.

Sarah: Nana, would you pray for us as we close on that night?

Nana: Of course.

Sarah: Thank you.

Nana: Our Father, we thank you that you are that king on a higher throne who is trustworthy and who is good. Please do help our hearts to believe this truth and help that to be expressed in our faith, to be expressed in our lives, to be expressed in our love for you and for others. Help us to persevere in faith and fulfill your purposes. Glorify your name and let your will be done. We thank you. Amen.

Felicity: Amen. Nana, thank you so much. I feel like my heart is just warmed just through this conversation. Such a joy. Do check out our questions on our show notes so that you can have these kind of discussions yourselves. Remember to just try and grab a friend. Listen along, read along, do what you can to warm each other's hearts as you dwell on Esther together. I think that's it, isn't it? Sarah, anything else to add?

Sarah: I think that's it's been such a joy to have you on. Like, I just want to sit down and walk up to be with you.

Felicity: Especially as she's got digestive.

Sarah: I know. Just a bit sad that I'm definitely a long way away from you to do that.

Felicity: Well, we're in the same country, but it's definitely an impossible feat at this point. Thank you so much, Nana. We'll see you again next time. Everyone. Bye bye. Thanks for listening. This podcast is sponsored by ten of those.com.