

Daily Reading

Monday December 5

Cool Skepticism

by Charles R. Swindoll

Exodus 14; Luke 9:10-17; 2 Peter 3

Nine-year-old Danny came bursting out of Sunday school like a wild stallion. His eyes were darting in every direction as he tried to locate either his mom or dad. Finally, after a quick search, he grabbed his daddy by the leg and yelled, "Man, that story of Moses and all those people crossing the Red Sea was great!" His father looked down, smiled, and asked the boy to tell him about it.

"Well, the Israelites got out of Egypt, but Pharaoh and his army chased after them. So the Jews ran as fast as they could until they got to the Red Sea. The Egyptian Army was gettin' closer and closer. So Moses got on his walkie-talkie and told the Israeli Air Force to bomb the Egyptians. While that was happening, the Israeli Navy built a pontoon bridge so the people could cross over. They made it!"

By now old dad was shocked. "Is *that* the way they taught you the story?"

"Well, no, not exactly," Danny admitted, "but if I told it to you the way they told it to us, you'd *never* believe it, Dad."

With childlike innocence the little guy put his finger on the pulse of our sophisticated adult world where cool skepticism reigns supreme. It's becoming increasingly more popular to operate in the black-and-white world of facts . . . and, of course, to leave no space for the miraculous.

It's really not a new mentality. Peter mentions it in one of his letters:

I want to remind you that in the last days there will come scoffers who will . . . laugh at the truth. This will be their line of argument: "So Jesus promised to come back, did he? Then where is he? He'll never come! Why, as far back as anyone can remember everything has remained exactly as it was since the first day of creation" (2 Peter 3:3-4 TLB).

Skeptics think like that. If they could choose their favorite hymn, it would certainly include the words, "As it was in the beginning, it is now and ever shall be. . . ."

Daily Reading

Tuesday December 6

Calm, Wise, and Confident

by Charles R. Swindoll

Read Esther 5:1–3

No king has ever intimidated God, no matter how wealthy his treasury, how extensive his kingdom, or how powerful his armies. God can handle anyone. Anyone! He can handle your husband. He can handle your wife. He can handle your kids. He can handle your pastor. He can handle the person who gives you grief. He can handle your ex-mate, that person who made you all those promises and broke most of them. He can even handle your enemy. He can handle the most intimidating situation, because in the hand of the Lord, any heart is like water.

Esther walks in that confidence. Look at her. She doesn't cringe and cower; she stands. Esther stood in front of the king's rooms. "The king saw Esther the queen standing" (emphasis mine.) She's not trembling. Though she's doing what's never been done before, she is standing tall, confident in the Lord.

And when the king saw her standing in the court, she obtained favor in his sight, and he extended his golden scepter to her. Remember, without that gesture from the king, she would die. And now, confident, she touches the top of the scepter, making a connection with the king. "Then the king said to her, 'What is troubling you, Queen Esther? And what is your request? Even to half of the kingdom it shall be given to you' " (Esther 5:3).

I love that. Esther doesn't know what to expect, and the king says simply, "What's on your mind? What's troubling you?" In fact, he goes further. He says, "What can I do for you? Name it. There's no limit; it's yours."

Now this is her moment to bring down the roof on Haman—but she doesn't. Not now. This is a wise woman who understands the value of timing. She isn't in a hurry, nor is she revengeful. You know why? She has been waiting on the Lord.

We get in a hurry when we don't wait on the Lord. We jump ahead and do rash things. We shoot from the hip. We run off at the mouth, saying things that we later regret. But when we have sufficiently waited on the Lord, He gets full control of our spirit. At such moments, we're like a glove, and His hand is moving us wherever He pleases. Having known that experience, I can testify, there's nothing to compare it to. It's marvelous!

Wait on the Lord

Daily Reading
Wednesday December 7
A Silent Interlude
by Charles R. Swindoll
Read Esther 4:12–17

Between chapters four and five of this ancient book of Esther, there's a break in time. It's a space of suspense when we don't know what is happening. Nothing is recorded for us to read. At the end of chapter four, we left Esther just as she had sent word to Mordecai that she was going to enter the king's presence uninvited, which could mean her instant death. Then there is a grand pause, and we pick up the story again in chapter five, three days later, when Esther is preparing to walk into the presence of the king, not knowing what the future holds. She literally breaks the law of the land by voluntarily interrupting the king.

This space represents a silent yet powerful interlude during which Esther draws on the source of her strength. How easy it is for us to forget that source. How easy for us to believe that she was born with a Mother Teresa conscience and a Joan of Arc courage. Yet just as no one is born prejudiced, so no one is born courageous.

Allow me a moment to pause here and ask you a couple of very personal questions. Do you teach your children to stand up for what they believe? Are you teaching your grandchildren how to be people of character, regardless? That's the way they will learn it. Let me probe one question deeper. Are you modeling authentic character? That leaves the message permanently etched in their minds.

You see, Esther didn't come onto this earth with a sensitive conscience and a courageous heart. She learned it from her cousin, Mordecai, who became her mentor and adoptive father. He knew how far he could stretch her with his challenge. And she rose to the challenge and said, "I'll do exactly as you have taught me to do."

Proverbs 22:6 says, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (NIV).

Daily Reading
Thursday December 8
I Will Stand
by Charles R. Swindoll
Read Esther 4:12–16

When it comes to touching the heart, few things do it as well as a song or a story. We all know occasions where the right music combined with the right lyrics wooed us or someone we know back to God. Sometimes it is a song that our mother taught us, or some moving hymn we learned years ago in church. Nostalgia serves us best when it's a magnet, drawing our hearts back to God.

A story will do the same, softening the soil of our souls. When you have the right characters who carry out life's issues in a plot that is mixed with adventure, surprise, and some humor, along with purpose and an ultimate moral, there's something about that story that sweeps us into a right state of mind. Esther is just such a story. It has adventure and suspense mixed with courage and hope, plus a touch of humor and certainly a twist of surprise.

What a great film or play Esther would make. Can't you just hear the words of Mordecai ringing with passion as he says, "If you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance will arise for the Jews from another place and you and your father's house will perish. And who knows whether you have not attained royalty for such a time as this?"

And then, with incredible courage, Esther herself replies, "Go, assemble all the Jews who are found in Susa, and fast for me; do not eat or drink for three days, night or day. I and my maidens also will fast in the same way. And thus I will go in to the king, which is not according to the law; and if I perish, I perish."

I can hear the applause as the curtain closes on this act with this grand speech that prepares our leading lady to take her place in history.

It reminds me of something C. S. Lewis said about the importance of being loyal to a cause that is greater than ourselves. He likened that quality to a person's chest. "What we need are people with chests." The old American word for this is "guts." We need people with guts who will say, "I will stand for this, and if I must die for it, then I die."

Will you be one of those people?

Daily Reading
Friday December 9
Going It Alone

by Charles R. Swindoll
Read Exodus 4:11–17

Do you know what God did? He accommodated Moses' desire. But the compromise was less than the best; brother Aaron proved to be an albatross around his neck. It was Aaron who got impatient while Moses was on the mountain and created a golden calf for the people to worship. It was he who told the people, "This is your god, O Israel, who brought you up from the land of Egypt" (Exodus 32:4).

As you read these words, you may sense God's nudge to step out on faith in a plan that seems risky at best. You don't have all the answers. You don't know the hows and whys and wherefores of what God has in mind. From a human point of view, the prospects look rather bleak. Do you know what our tendency is? It's to take someone with us. Somehow, that keeps us from having to put our full trust in the Lord's plan; we can lean on that gifted friend or companion we've brought along with us.

How many men have gone into a business partnership and lived to regret the day they chose that partner? How many women have engaged in pursuits with a companion they wish they had never asked to join them? God's call is a serious, individual matter. While I believe with all my heart in accountability, God's call does not lend itself to the buddy system or to group excursions. And before you bring any other individual along with you to fulfill that call, or before you join a team, you must make absolutely certain in your heart that each one has the same vision beating in his or her heart that you do.

If not, then take this advice, my friend: Go it alone. Follow God's voice without distraction.

God was finally willing to say to Moses, "All right, all right, have it your way. I'll send Aaron, too, but it isn't My best, Moses. The day will come when you will wish you'd followed My call on your own. You don't really need Aaron; all you need is Me."