

Don't Be A Fool
Esther 1
Bellevue Baptist
Sunday, June 7, 2026

If you're over 40, surely you recognize this man: Mr. T. American actor. Retired professional wrestler. Pop culture icon. Mr. T had one of the most recognizable looks in television history: the wild mohawk, massive muscles, and enough gold chains to sink a boat.

But he wasn't just known for his appearance. He became famous for a catchphrase that swept across America. Do you remember it?

"I pity the fool..." He would say, "I pity the fool" who does this or "I pity the fool" who does that. The phrase became his signature. Surprisingly, he came up with the idea while reading the Bible...

Mr. T is right. In the Bible, we are told to have some sympathy for a fool—to have pity for a person who doesn't know better. The man is stuck in the rut of wrong thinking, and what he truly needs is for God to touch and change their heart. In the Bible, Mr. T had a lot of foolish material to pull from.

"The way of a fool is right in his own eyes..." Proverbs 12:15

"Like a dog that returns to its vomit, so a fool repeats his foolishness." Proverbs 26:11

"The fool says in his heart, 'There is no God.'" Psalm 14:1

Over and over again, in Scripture, we are warned about playing the part of the fool. A fool is someone who lives as they please, with no regard for what God wants them to do.

Which brings us to Esther chapter 1. In the start of this story, we run into a fool. He is not a poor fool. Or a weak fool. He is a rich and powerful fool. He is a man with unlimited resources, unlimited servants, and unlimited earthly authority. His name is King Ahasuerus, and he ruled over 127 provinces that stretched across the ancient Middle East. If Forbes Magazine had existed back then, he would have been on the cover many times. And yet, despite all his success, Esther 1 warns us about living our lives like him.

Before you meet the king, let me tell you a little about Esther, assuming some may be new to the Bible. In my opinion, Esther is one of the most interesting Old Testament books. At the center of the story stands a strong female protagonist. Esther is a true underdog that we all want to root for—a rags-to-riches story. She starts on the floor of the social food chain—as an obscure Jewish exile. No influence. No royal bloodline. She is unknown, vulnerable, and seemingly insignificant.

But just like all of us, God had a plan for her life much larger than she knew, and God sets the stage by using the antics of a fool.

I am going to read the first 12 verses of the story. I'm not going to put the words on the screen because the story is written in a way that it can be easily read and understood.

These events took place during the days of Ahasuerus, who ruled 127 provinces from India to Cush. ² In those days King Ahasuerus reigned from his royal throne in the fortress at Susa. ³ He held a feast in the third year of his reign for all his officials and staff, the army of Persia and Media, the nobles, and the officials from the provinces. ⁴ He displayed the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness for a total of 180 days.

⁵ At the end of this time, the king held a week-long banquet in the garden courtyard of the royal palace for all the people, from the greatest to the least, who were present in the fortress of Susa. ⁶ White and blue linen hangings were fastened with fine white and purple linen cords to silver rods on marble columns. Gold and silver couches were arranged on a mosaic pavement of red feldspar, marble, mother-of-pearl, and precious stones.

⁷ Drinks were served in an array of gold goblets, each with a different design. Royal wine flowed freely, according to the king's bounty. ⁸ The drinking was according to royal decree: "There are no restrictions." The king had ordered every wine steward in his household to serve whatever each person wanted. ⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a feast for the women of King Ahasuerus's palace.

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when the king was feeling good from the wine, Ahasuerus commanded Mehuman, Biztha, Harbona, Bigtha, Abagtha, Zethar, and Carkas—the seven eunuchs who personally served him—¹¹ to bring Queen Vashti before him with her royal crown. He wanted to show off her beauty to the people and the officials, because she was very beautiful. ¹² But Queen Vashti refused to come at the king's command that was delivered by his eunuchs. The king became furious and his anger burned within him. Es 1:1–12

As I said before, the story starts with human folly. Here is a man who has no moral compass, who makes poor decisions and misuses power. Don't be like him. Here we find:

Don't Be A Biblical Fool

1. A Biblical fool likes to boast.

If you've ever been around a person that toots their own horn, you know how repulsive it can be. People like that make you say, "Well, look at the time. Gotta run!"

A foolish person assumes every person is a potential member of his fan club. He's always trying to sign people up for his newsletter. A fool dominates conversations, hijacks every story, and finds a way to turn every topic back to him.

Another way a fool operates is by showing off his possessions. As if having fancy things will endear others. A fool says makes sure you know that he arrived in a luxury vehicle—made sure it was parked in a remote place. He sneaks it into conversation that he's been busy making repairs on the boat he bought for his vacation home. He's curating an image. He's building a brand, and hoping you buy it.

This is the atmosphere we enter in in Esther 1.

The king clearly saying, in case you didn't know, "I'm kind of a big deal." The parties are just over-the-top. For 180 straight days, he hosts a colossal celebration designed to display "the glorious wealth of his kingdom and the magnificent splendor of his greatness." And here's the kicker—as if six months of hedonism wasn't enough, he sends it to overtime, with a seven-day feast for all who live near. This is not hospitality. This is shameless self-promotion.

As I read the passage, you probably noticed how any words are used to amplify the extravagance and might I say—the waste—of the Find-Out-I'm-Fabulous Festival. Did you notice white and violet linens, the marble pillars, the golden goblets, the expensive couches, fancy wine flowing with free refills. Surely this story inspired F. Scott Fitzgerald when he wrote the first chapters of *The Great Gatsby*.

But here's the irony of showboating—what the Holy Spirit helps us to see. This king desperately wants to appear secure, but all of the money in the world won't make a man feel special. Or loved. Or safe. In fact, the ultra-rich often live in fear that everything they own will one day vanish. And it may.

A biblical fool builds his life on sand, but the wise build their house on a rock. The Bible repeatedly warns us about letting our possessions be the proof that we are special. Jesus said:

Watch out and be on guard against all greed, because one's life is not in the abundance of his possessions. Luke 12:15

But if we're honest, this is incredibly hard for us as humans. We quietly use possessions to measure our success, status, and significance.

In his book *Essentialism*, Greg McKeown gives an illustration about clothes in our closets. He points out that most people own far more clothing than they actually wear. We all have a small rotation of favorite shirts, while the rest just hang there collecting dust.

So why don't we get rid of them? Why don't we give them to Legacy Thrift and let someone else wear those shirts? It's a good question. He says the answer is this: we remember what we paid for that shirt, at the store. "That shirt cost me \$75!"

We imagine the shirt still carries that same value, even though nobody is wearing it, nobody is enjoying it, and nobody else would pay anywhere near that amount for it now. So it hangs in the closet for another decade.

I find that illustration deeply convicting because it reveals something true about my own heart: possessions have power. In a subtle way, they whisper in our ear the lie: "Look at all the shirts you own. What a powerful man you must be! More shirts than there are occasions!"

And we don't even notice we are doing it, but we are trying to draw safety and security from stuff. Jesus steps squarely on our toes when he says, "Do not think that significance, true significance, has anything to do with the amount of shirts currently hanging in your closet!" And do not think, for a second, should you lose ALL the shirts, that something has subtracted from your identity

Your life loses little when you have less possessions. But King Ahasuerus would have jailed Jesus for saying such things. He had bought into the world's way.

1 John 2:16 states:

For everything in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—comes not from the Father but from the world. 1 John 2:16

Don't be a biblical fool, who boasts about all that he has accomplished or accumulated. What else does a biblical fool do?

2. A Biblical fool lets a substance control him.

V. 10 says that, after seven days of drinking, the king's "heart was merry with wine." We all know what that means. He had a lot of liquid courage running through his veins. The alcohol was now doing the talking and his ability to think was compromised.

The king makes a choice that will change the course of his life. In order to build his brand even more, he commands Queen Vashti to parade in front of his drunken friends—that all might see his prized possession. She becomes part of the "I'm-So-Fabulous-Festival."

Gentlemen, just in case the palace, the pillars, the goblets, and the rivers of wine failed to provoke envy, wouldn't you like to have a wife whose face fits the front of a magazine?

He belittles his wife, and lets the wine do the talking.

The Bible repeatedly warns us about this danger.

Proverbs 20:1 says:

Wine is a mocker, beer is a brawler, and whoever goes astray because of them is not wise.

Proverbs 20:1

Proverbs 23 gives an even stronger warning:

**Do not gaze at wine when it is red, when it sparkles in the cup, when it goes down smoothly!
In the end it bites like a snake and poisons like a viper. Proverbs 23:31-32**

And Ephesians 5:18 says:

Do not get drunk with wine, which leads to reckless living, but be filled by the Spirit. Eph 5:18

That's my favorite verse about this issue. Because Scripture says: if you have the choice between being filled and influenced by the Spirit that raised Jesus Christ from the dead, the Spirit that filled the disciples with holy boldness as they stood before Emperors—if that is freely available, why would you want a lesser thing to drive your decision-making, soften your soft control, and treat you like its slave. The Bible, over and over again, warns against drunkenness, addictions, and using substances to cloud your judgment. That's what you're supposed to see in this story. Last month, this issue came up in the text and you may remember, I told the story of actor Matthew Perry and how he instantly loved alcohol the first time he tasted it. From there, he waded into deeper drugs. I shared the danger involved here—that nobody knows their

predispositions to addiction until they try it. After that service, one of our biblical counselors wrote me this email:

Ben,

**I am so grateful that you addressed that small portion about pills and addiction!
Our church wrestles with this (including the Christian non-members we see every day), and
they do not see nor feel convicted that the inordinate use of pills IS an addiction!**

I just wanted to thank you!

That's coming from someone who sees people all day, helping them work through their problems. Be on guard when anything but the Holy Spirit is your coping mechanism.

The King was not under God's control, and I want to show you that this isn't just Old Testament stuff. A fascinating modern example of what I'm describing took place in the presidency of Richard Nixon during the years of the Watergate disaster. Watergate was one of the biggest political scandals in American history. Men connected to President Nixon were caught breaking into an office to spy on opponents and to tamper with information. Once it became clear he would not get away with it, President Nixon knew his credibility was tarnished, and for the sake of his party, he resigned in 1974, becoming the first U.S. president ever to step down from office.

Here's the part that relates to our passage. According to historians, when stress skyrocketed, Nixon formed a habit of sitting alone at night, drinking his pain away. The president's nightly ritual of numbing the pain grew so intense that the Secretary of State told military officials: "If the president calls and tells you to start firing missiles, do not carry out that order without checking with me first."

The people closest to the President of the United States—the most powerful man in the world—were walking with sweaty palms each night wondering if the president would be making the decisions, or his drink.

Look at history if you don't believe the Bible. We are playing with fire when we let life-controlling substances hang around our life.

In Esther 1, the king cannot control himself. His impulses are ruling him. He will pass the point of no return with the Queen.

Now, let's pick up in the story and see what happens. In vv.13-22, the king consults with his top officials, receiving some bad advice. Rather than calming down, and showing restraint—rather than discussing this matter privately, he makes a snap decision. He issues a royal decree across 127 provinces because one woman embarrassed him.

In v. 15, he raises the question:

The king asked, “According to the law, what should be done with Queen Vashti, since she refused to obey King Ahasuerus’s command that was delivered by the eunuchs?” Es 1:15

If I ever call a business meeting, and say, “What do you all say? What should Senior Pastor Ben Mandrell do?” Fire me right that instant. His counselors don’t call for his firing, but instead, they fuel the madness. They say, “King, you must be called to action...”

¹⁷ For the queen’s action will become public knowledge to all the women and cause them to despise their husbands and say, ‘King Ahasuerus ordered Queen Vashti brought before him, but she did not come.’ ¹⁸ Before this day is over, the noble women of Persia and Media who hear about the queen’s act will say the same thing to all the king’s officials, resulting in more contempt and fury. Es 1:17–18

Let me translate that: “King, you are so powerful that the people are going to follow your example. Every husband is watching, what will you do, when your woman defies you?” If you don’t do something, every woman across the land will rise up. We’ll have a woman-revolution on our hands!”

One fool’s bruised ego is about to bring national attention.

Here we have the third unmistakable marker of a fool.

3. A Biblical fool likes his ears to be tickled.

The apostle Paul wrote a warning for the church in 2 Tim. 4:3, predicting a time in the future when people will want to hear sermons that butter them up, not boldly confront them. He writes: : The time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear.”

“Itching ears” is a figure of speech that refers to people’s desires, felt needs, or wants. Those who have “itching ears” want a preacher that makes them feel comfortable, watering down the

truth, because the truth is often *uncomfortable*. Paul warned the church that one day, a man will be invited to be the pastor of the church because he scratches ears.

That kind of preaching produces no repentance. You can be sure a church is headed toward disaster when the man in the pulpit only says what sinners like to hear.

Paul writes to his protege, Timothy:

I give you this charge: ²Preach the word; be prepared in season and out of season; correct, rebuke and encourage—with great patience and careful instruction. ³For the time will come when people will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear. 2 Tim 4:1-3

This king in Ester 1 was a fool for showing off all his wealth and power. He was a fool for getting drunk with wine. But even in all that, his life could have stayed on course if he had one wise friend who had the courage to say what he didn't want to hear. One friend who said: "King, I know you're upset with the Queen. Why don't we all go to bed and talk it over tomorrow?" But the fool surrounded himself with non-discerning people.

We are, as humans, in great danger when we make decisions in isolation or, when we make decisions without discerning people around us. Discernment is a gift from God, and some people have it in spades, while others have to draw from the well of others.

I don't think the gift of discernment is one of my strongest gifts. Here's what I mean. I have a brain that likes to wake up before the sun, and it's like a conveyor belt with thousands of little chocolates parading by. The mind God gave me is very creative, and ideas come quickly. This may sound braggadocious but the gift of imagination can create whiplash for those around me.

All of the chocolates look equally delicious. How can my mind be so smart in some ways, and so not-smart in other ways? This is the humbling part of being human—we all have gifts we bring to the table, but they only work when combined with the gifts of others. God has designed us to be interdependent.

Which is why we should not surround ourselves with people who like to tickle our ears—who like to tell us how wonderful all those chocolates TRULY are, even though they aren't telling the truth.

A Seasoned Christian Asks:

Why do mature Christians still struggle with ego after walking with God for decades?

In a single word, the answer is pride.

If you could distill all the sin in the world into one word, it would be pride. Pride was the first sin in heaven. Pride was the first sin in the Garden. Pride is the temptation behind nearly every other temptation. It whispers, *"I know better than God. I deserve more than others. I can do this without Him."*

One of the reasons influential people often struggle with pride is that success without struggle creates a sense of superiority. Imagine a teenager uploading a YouTube video that goes viral and suddenly becomes a millionaire. That victory can become his greatest danger. The enemy begins whispering, *"You are special. You are a cut above the rest. You were born for the spotlight."*

The Bible shows us this danger repeatedly. Perhaps the clearest example is the Apostle Paul in 2 Corinthians 12. Paul had seen extraordinary things and been used by God in extraordinary ways. Yet he writes:

"Therefore, so that I would not exalt myself, a thorn in the flesh was given to me..."

We don't know exactly what the thorn was, but we know what it accomplished. It reminded Paul that he was human. It reminded him that God's power is made perfect in weakness. It kept him dependent.

I've often noticed that success can do something suffering cannot. Success can convince a person that they don't need God. Suffering usually drives us back to Him.

Francis Schaeffer wrote a little essay called *The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way*. One of his central ideas is that we cannot know the power of the Holy Spirit until we first acknowledge our desperate need for Christ. The entry point for Christianity is soul-poverty—the feeling that I am bankrupt and God is rich. Dependence is the doorway to spiritual power.

A person cannot be a Christian without first recognizing his need for Christ. And as Christians, we too must comprehend something of our need for spiritual power. If we think we can operate on our own, if we do not comprehend our need for a power beyond our own, we will never get started. If we think the power of our own cleverness is enough, we will be at a standstill. —Francis Schaeffer, *The Lord's Work in the Lord's Way*

This explains why a person who has walked with Christ for 20 years can still find himself in danger—all these people saying, "Look how clever you are! Wow. What a standout! What a spectacular specimen. You must really be something." And the praise can push the person into a place of self-dependence vs Spirit dependence.

Christians still battle ego. The temptation never fully leaves. Every accomplishment, every compliment, every victory creates an opportunity to either glorify God or glorify ourselves.

Confidence says, *"God has helped me do this."* Cockiness says, *"Look what I've done."*

The difference may seem small, but one leads to worship and the other leads to pride.

Which is why Scripture keeps repeating the same command:

"Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will exalt you." James 4:10

God can do far more with a humble servant who knows his need than with a gifted servant who has forgotten it.

A Good Hearted Skeptic Asks:

Why would God care whether someone drinks too much if they aren't hurting anybody?

That's a fair question.

And I think we should push it beyond alcohol. You could ask the same thing about pornography, gambling, materialism, or spending enormous amounts of money on trivial pursuits. There are lots of things that could fall into the category of "why does it matter if nobody knows?"

You might say...

"I don't see the problem if I'm looking at things online that are bad for my soul, so long as nobody else knows I'm doing it." Or:

"I don't see the problem if I spend thousands of dollars collecting things I don't need, so long as my bills are paid." Or:

"I don't see the problem if I gamble for entertainment, so long as I'm winning." Or:

"I don't see the problem if I drink too much in my own home, so long as I don't get behind the wheel." Or:

"I don't see the problem if I spend four hours a day obsessing over a hobby, so long as I'm still showing up for work."

In each case, the argument is the same:

"If I'm not hurting anybody else, what's the problem?"

But that question reveals a misunderstanding of what God cares about most.

The Bible teaches that God is not merely interested in whether our actions damage other people. He is deeply concerned about what those actions are doing to us. God is always looking beneath the behavior to the heart.

The problem is that the Bible teaches that God is concerned with far more than the consequences of our actions. He is concerned with the condition of our hearts.

For example, the Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver. Think about that. You could drop a million dollars into the offering plate today, but if your motive is to impress people, to build your reputation, or to make others think you're generous, God is not impressed. He sees beyond the gift and into the heart behind the gift.

God is always looking deeper.

This is why Jesus spent so much time addressing motives. The Pharisees were experts at looking righteous on the outside while their hearts were drifting from God on the inside.

The Bible has a word for anything that begins to occupy the place that belongs to God alone. It calls it idolatry. An idol is anything we look to for security, fulfillment, comfort, identity, or meaning apart from God. So the issue is not merely alcohol. The issue is not merely gambling. The issue is not merely money. The issue is not merely a hobby.

The question is: What is ruling your heart? What are you relying on to make life feel meaningful? What are you turning to when you're lonely, anxious, bored, or afraid?

When a substance begins to control you, when money begins to define you, when pleasure begins to master you, or when a hobby becomes more important than your relationship with God, the issue is no longer the activity itself. The issue is that something has climbed onto the throne of your heart that was never meant to sit there.

God cares because He loves you. He knows that every idol eventually overpromises and underdelivers. The invitation of Christianity is not merely to stop bad behaviors. It is to find in God what we keep trying to find everywhere else.

A Student Asks:

What's one habit I could start right now that would help me avoid becoming a fool later in life?

Here's my answer. Become a listener.

If I could give every student in this room one habit that would help them grow in wisdom: teach yourself to listen well. That may sound simple, but it is surprisingly rare. Foolish people spend their lives trying to convince others that they are smart but wise people spend their lives learning from others.

The book of Proverbs says: *"Without counsel, plans fail, but with many advisers they succeed."*

The best leaders are not the people who have all the answers. The best leaders understand that all of us are wiser than any one of us.

So let me make this practical.

Whenever you are around an older person who has lived a good life, ask them this question:

"If you could go back in time, what is something you would do differently?"

This is my favorite question to ask older people, because nobody gets through life without regrets. Nobody gets every decision right. Every seasoned Christian believer has scars. You can learn from their mistakes without having to repeat them.

One of the reasons God gave us the Bible is so that we could learn from the successes and failures of those who came before us. As Romans says:

For whatever was written in the past was written for our instruction, so that we may have hope through endurance and through the encouragement from the Scriptures. Romans 15:4

Think about that. God gave us an entire book filled with stories of people who got it right and people who got it wrong. Why? So we wouldn't have to learn every lesson the hard way.

A fool says, "I'll figure it out myself."

A wise person says, "Teach me."

And the moment you become teachable, you are already walking away from the path of the fool.