TRACK THREE

THE GALLOWS AND THE REVERSAL · COMPANION GUIDE

YOUTH MINISTRY

A 60-75 minute youth night for middle and high school students: a hook, a talk, discussion, breakouts, and a challenge for the week.

THE BIG IDEA

God is never absent, even when He seems hidden. He can turn the worst moment around, and in Jesus He turned the cross into the world's greatest reversal. Our response is gladness and generosity, not revenge.

NIGHT PLAN

	60 MIN	75 MIN
Arrival and hook	8	10
Watch the film	12	12
Leader talk	14	17
Large-group discussion	8	10
Small-group breakouts	12	16
Reflection	4	6
Challenge and prayer	2	4

THE HOOK: FLIP IT

Write four things from Esther 3-5 on the board: *Haman's gallows. The king's ring. Haman's decree. Mordecai in sackcloth.* In pairs, students guess how each one might flip by the end of the story. Give a small prize for the best guess. Bridge: *In tonight's film, every one of these turns upside down, and none of it by chance.*

Low-prep option: *Best Plot Twist.* Students name the best plot twist they've seen in a movie or book and why it worked (no spoilers required).

LEADER TALK

1 **A SLEEPLESS NIGHT.** “On that night, the king couldn’t sleep.” (6:1) Of all the pages he could have heard, he heard about Mordecai. Of all the moments Haman could walk in, he walked in then. The narrator never says “God did this.” He leaves it unstated, but the rest of Scripture tells us plainly who rules the lot and the king's heart (Proverbs 21:1): “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from Yahweh.” (Proverbs 16:33)

2 **PRIDE'S TRAP.** Haman thought, “Who would the king delight to honor more than myself?” (6:6) He designed his own dream parade, then had to lead it for Mordecai. His friends saw it coming: “you will surely fall before him.” (6:13) Pride writes the script for its own fall.

3 **ESTHER SPEAKS.** At the second banquet, Esther finally names the danger: “For we are sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be slain, and to perish.” (7:4) And then the enemy: “An adversary and an enemy, even this wicked Haman!” (7:6) Her courage in chapter 4 becomes clear speech in chapter 7.

4 **THE REVERSAL.** Haman dies on the gallows he built (7:10). Mordecai gets the king's ring (8:2). A new decree answers the old one (8:8-11). When the day came, “but it turned out that the opposite happened” (9:1). The month “was turned to them from sorrow to gladness” (9:22).

5 **JESUS.** *(A gospel connection, not a prediction in Esther.)* Haman was hanged for his own evil. Jesus was hanged on a cross for ours: “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law, having become a curse for us.” (Galatians 3:13) Jesus told His friends, “You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy.” (John 16:20) The resurrection is the greatest reversal.

6 **GLADNESS THAT GIVES.** Purim celebrates rescue: “days of feasting and gladness, and of sending presents of food to one another, and gifts to the needy” (9:22). Chapter 9 also records deadly conflict, and we should read it honestly, as the self-defense the king's decree allowed (8:11; 9:2), and in light of Jesus' teaching: “Don’t seek revenge yourselves…” (Romans 12:19). People who've been rescued become generous.

DISCUSSION

MIDDLE SCHOOL

1. Which unexpected event in the story mattered most to what happened next? Why?
2. How did Haman's pride set him up to fall?
3. Esther finally spoke up clearly (7:3-6). What changed since chapter 4?
4. What's something you're waiting for God to turn around?

HIGH SCHOOL

1. The book never names God, yet the timing is everywhere. Why might the author tell it this way?
2. Read Proverbs 24:17 and Romans 12:19-21. How should Christians feel when someone who hurt them falls?
3. Chapter 9 is hard to read. What helps you read violent parts of the Bible honestly?
4. How is the cross the greatest reversal of all?

BREAKOUT GROUPS

1. Where have you seen God work in a way you only noticed looking back?
2. When someone does something wrong to you, what are safe ways to respond without seeking revenge (Romans 12:21)? If someone is hurting or threatening you, the right step is to tell a trusted adult.
3. What sorrow do you want to see turned to gladness?
4. Who is one person you could give a “gift of gladness” to this week?

REFLECTION: TWO OPTIONS

Phones down. Hand each student an index card. On one side they write *Sorrow*: something hard they're carrying. On the other, *Gladness*: one thing they thank God for. Have them keep it and flip it over when they pray this week.

Phones out (no social media). Students privately write a note titled *Turned around* with one hard thing and one thanks, and set a reminder to pray over it. No one shows a screen or says what they wrote.

THIS WEEK'S CHALLENGE

A GIFT OF GLADNESS.

Give one gift this week, of time, words, or something small, to a friend and one to someone in need. If someone has hurt you, pray for them instead of planning payback. Next time your small group meets, share how it went, if you want to. Anyone may pass.

LEADER NOTES ON HARD QUESTIONS

"IS IT OKAY TO BE GLAD WHEN THE BAD GUY LOSES?" We can rejoice that evil is stopped and the oppressed are safe. But Scripture warns, "Don't rejoice when your enemy falls." (Proverbs 24:17) and tells us to leave vengeance to God (Romans 12:19). Gladness at rescue is not the same as gloating.

"WASN'T CHAPTER 9 JUST REVENGE?" The new decree let the Jews "defend their lives" (8:11) against those who would attack them. The text repeats that they took no plunder (9:10, 15, 16). Verse 8:11 also mentions "little ones and women"; some read it as copying Haman's decree, others as protecting the Jews' own families. Present both views and don't overclaim. Christians today are never called to holy war; we are told to "overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

"WHAT ABOUT ESTHER ASKING FOR A SECOND DAY (9:13)?" Interpreters differ: some think enemies remained in Susa; others question her request. Haman's sons were already dead (9:10); hanging them showed the danger was over. It's okay to say the text doesn't explain.

PASTORAL CARE. Some students carry real hurt from someone. Don't push them to "just forgive" on the spot; forgiveness is a process. If anyone is being hurt or is unsafe, connect them with a trusted adult.

SAFEGUARDING. If a child or teen tells you about abuse, neglect, self-harm, harmful drinking or drug use at home, or anything else that makes you worried for their safety: stay calm, listen, and thank them for telling you. Don't promise to keep it secret, don't question them for details or investigate, and don't confront anyone involved. Write down what they said as soon as you can, and report it the same day to your church's designated safeguarding lead, following your church's safeguarding policy and any mandatory-reporting law that applies to you. If anyone is in immediate danger, stay with them and call emergency services. Telling a church safeguarding lead does not replace any report the law requires you to make directly to child-protection authorities or police.

PRAYER

Give students a moment of silence with their cards. Then close: *God, You were never absent from Esther's story, and You're not absent from ours. Turn our sorrow into gladness. Keep us from revenge, and make us generous. Thank You that Jesus turned the cross into victory. Amen.*