

“Living While Waiting”
By: Dulce Ferguson

Women’s Ministries Emphasis Day

RESOURCE PACKET

June 11, 2005

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Resource Packet

Living While Waiting (for Jesus to Come)

2005 World Church Theme—United in the Warmth of Fellowship

Written by Dulce Ferguson
South Pacific Division

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Introduction

Program Outline

(This is a suggested guideline for your worship program.)

Scripture Reading

(It is helpful to read this before the sermon to set the scene. Four people can be used for this reading.)

Children's Story

(You may choose a story to fit in with the theme of living in honesty and integrity and the importance of telling and living the truth.)

Sermon

(The presentation can be made by one person or could be divided into three parts using three different people.)

Dear Sister in Christ,

I was blessed to have been born into an Adventist Christian home. My mother was a full-time homemaker and my father worked in the church publishing house in Victoria in the southeast corner of Australia, part of the South Pacific Division. We were reminded often that Jesus was coming soon. Five decades later Australia has become a very secular society where people worship sports and possessions rather than their Creator and Provider (much like the ancient Greeks and Persians). On the other hand, the many island missions that form part of our division have seen an explosion of Christianity and tremendous growth in our church, but as time goes on secularism is creeping into their developing lands.

Trusting childhood memories have undergone numerous reality checks with a realisation that Jesus has delayed His coming. Sadly, many of my friends have given up the wait and have ceased to attend church, while others have been touched by God's spirit and are returning. Praise the Lord!

The courage to remain faithful to Jesus despite the allurements of this world is a huge challenge to followers of Christ in our secular society. The temptations that Satan places before us to lead us away from Jesus have been very successful.

As Christian women we hold a great responsibility to model well the high calling God has placed before us. We model this in our homes, our churches; communities, and places of employment. Daily we must seek God's guidance to live life to the full in His way and in His will.

With our God-given abilities for nurture we can do much to create an atmosphere of God's love and acceptance to all people. Are we as church members doing all we can to create a place where Fellowship is warm? A place where the wanderer feels they can return and be accepted?

I trust that this presentation will remind us all of how Jesus would have us live as we wait and work for His return. May He pour His Spirit upon us that we may be enthusiastic about sharing His love and preparing for His soon coming.

Sincerely,

Dulce Ferguson

Dulce Ferguson is the Administrative Assistant to the Greater Sydney Conference president and Ministerial Association secretary and the Women's Ministries Coordinator. She has a passion for her local church and when she finds the time she enjoys dressmaking, handcrafts, and gardening. She is married to a supportive and gentle carpenter who enjoys music, building, and flying model aircraft.

LIVING WHILE WAITING - FOR JESUS TO COME

Suggested Worship Outline

- Praise and Worship Choose some young women to lead in singing songs
#337 Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal "Redeemed"
#341 Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal "To God Be the Glory"
#327 Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal "I'd Rather Have Jesus Than Silver or Gold"
- Welcome
- Opening Song #15 Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal "My Maker and My King"
- Congregational Prayer Please keep in mind the special needs of women in the highlighted church division, your local congregation, and Women's Ministries in general.
- Offering Introduction to offering as per your Conference/Mission offering schedule
- Offertory and Prayer
- Children's Story OR Choose with theme in mind
Testimony OR Choose a woman who has remained faith to God through hardship, who is willing to share her journey.
- Honor a Women Honor a woman OR women who have given special service to the church or community by exhibiting the virtues of Romans 12:9
- Hymn or Special Music Choose with theme in mind – special item or
#325 Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal "Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken"
- Scripture Reading Esther 1-2:1
(use four people – reading and instructions following)
- Sermon "The Vanishing Queen"
- Closing Hymn #309 Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal "All to Jesus I Surrender"
- Closing Prayer

SCRIPTURE READING

The sermon is based on the Scriptural record of Queen Vashti. The reading below is pure Scripture (excluding only the names of Xerxes officials as they are very difficult to pronounce). This can be read by four people:

Narrator	Woman
King Xerxes	Man
Memucan	Man
Queen Vashti	Teenage girl

To create a visual effect each person can wear head gear. Narrator (hat of your local culture); King Xerxes (crown made of gold card encrusted with cheap imitation jewels or a crown worn by country leader in your culture); Memucan (create a lesser-style hat of nobility than the king's crown); Queen Vashti (a cheap princess' tiara or gold crown similar to the King's).

ESTHER 1-2:1

1 Woman Narrator

2 Girl/Woman – Queen Vashti

3 Memucan

4 Kings Xerxes

WOMAN NARRATOR

This is what happened during the time of Xerxes, the Xerxes who ruled over 127 provinces stretching from India to Cush: ² At that time King Xerxes reigned from his royal throne in the citadel of Susa, ³ and in the third year of his reign he gave a banquet for all his nobles and officials. The military leaders of Persia and Media, the princes, and the nobles of the provinces were present.

⁴ For a full 180 days he displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty. ⁵ When these days were over, the king gave a banquet, lasting seven days, in the enclosed garden of the king's palace, for all the people from the least to the greatest, who were in the citadel of Susa. ⁶ The garden had hangings of white and blue linen, fastened with cords of white linen and purple material to silver rings on marble pillars. There were couches of gold and silver on a mosaic pavement of porphyry, marble, mother-of-pearl and other costly stones. ⁷ Wine was served in goblets of gold, each one different from the other, and the royal wine was abundant, in keeping with the king's liberality. ⁸ By the king's command each guest was allowed to drink in his own way, for the king instructed all the wine stewards to serve each man what he wished.

GIRL – QUEEN VASHTI

⁹ Queen Vashti also gave a banquet for the women in the royal palace of King Xerxes.

¹⁰ On the seventh day, when King Xerxes was in high spirits from wine, he commanded the seven eunuchs who served him....¹¹ to bring before him Queen Vashti, wearing her royal crown, in order to display her beauty to the people and nobles, for she was lovely to look at. ¹² But when the attendants delivered the king's command, Queen Vashti refused to come. Then the king became furious and burned with anger.

WOMAN NARRATOR

¹³ Since it was customary for the king to consult experts in matters of law and justice, he spoke with the wise men who understood the times ¹⁴ and were closest to the king- one of whom was

Memucan, the seven nobles of Persia and Media who had special access to the king and were highest in the kingdom.

KING XERXES

¹⁵ "According to law, what must be done to Queen Vashti?" he asked. "She has not obeyed the command of King Xerxes that the eunuchs have taken to her."

MEMUCAN

¹⁶ Then Memucan replied in the presence of the king and the nobles, "Queen Vashti has done wrong, not only against the king but also against all the nobles and the peoples of all the provinces of King Xerxes. ¹⁷ For the queen's conduct will become known to all the women, and so they will despise their husbands and say, 'King Xerxes commanded Queen Vashti to be brought before him, but she would not come.' ¹⁸ This very day the Persian and Median women of the nobility who have heard about the queen's conduct will respond to all the king's nobles in the same way. There will be no end of disrespect and discord.

¹⁹ "Therefore, if it pleases the king, let him issue a royal decree and let it be written in the laws of Persia and Media, which cannot be repealed, that Vashti is never again to enter the presence of King Xerxes. Also let the king give her royal position to someone else who is better than she. ²⁰ Then when the king's edict is proclaimed throughout all his vast realm, all the women will respect their husbands, from the least to the greatest."

WOMAN NARRATOR

²¹ The king and his nobles were pleased with this advice, so the king did as Memucan proposed. ²² He sent dispatches to all parts of the kingdom, to each province in its own script and to each people in its own language, proclaiming in each people's tongue that every man should be ruler over his own household.

QUEEN VASHTI

2:1 Later when the anger of King Xerxes had subsided, he remembered Vashti and what she had done and what he had decreed about her.

SERMON

THE VANISHING QUEEN

Note to Presenter: You can choose Introduction #1 or #2, relating this as the author's experience, or you may personalize your introduction with recollections of your own thoughts.)

MODEL OF INTRODUCTION #1

About four years ago my husband, Graham, and I joined with his family in an historical tour of the northern dairy farming land of Victoria. It was here that his mother grew up on the banks of Gun Bower Creek near Bendigo and his father in Swan Hill. We visited all things old, like his mother's primary school at Gun Bower Creek, the old community hall where mom and dad met, the tumble-down house where they lived after they were first married, and the cemetery where the ancestors are buried. Now you may think me weird, but I rather enjoy walking through cemeteries. As I read the epitaphs on the tombstones they tell the stories of lives well lived or cut short. Sometimes it can be a young mother and her infant. Young people who hardly had a chance at life. And others tell us of lives lived long and to the full. And as I wander I can get quite caught up in my imaginary world. And I occasionally wonder what the epitaph on my tombstone might say about me after I am dead. If I had the choice to write it myself, what would I say.

I found some that people had written about themselves. This epitaph found in a Georgia cemetery which was short and to the point:

"I told you I was sick."

John Penny wrote his own epitaph

"Reader if cash thou art in want of any

Dig 4 feet

And thou wilt find a Penny."

Note to translator: change "penny" to the name of a small coin known in your language)

A widow in a Vermont cemetery used her late husband's tomb stone as a billboard –

"Sacred to the memory of John Barnes who died January 3, 1803.

His comely young widow, aged 23, has many qualifications of a good wife, and yearns to be comforted."

A lawyer's epitaph in England:

"Sir John Strange

Here lies an honest lawyer, and that is Strange."

Note to translator: Translate the name "strange" into the local equivalent)

In Ribbesford England

“To the memory of Anna Wallace

The children of Israel wanted bread and the Lord sent them manna,
Old clerk Wallace wanted a wife and the Devil sent him Anna.”

On a headstone in New Mexico –

“Here lies Johnny Yeast

Pardon me for not rising.”

Note to translator: Translate the name “yeast” into the local equivalent)

And in London –

“Ann Mann

Here lies Ann Mann

Who lived an old maid

But died and old Mann

December 8, 1767

Note to translator: Translate the name “Mann” into the local equivalent)

End #1

MODEL OF INTRODUCTION #2

(You may be able to personalize your introduction with recollections of your own thoughts.)

Recently it was my sad privilege to attend the funeral of two women in as many weeks. Sue was 42 years old. The daughter of missionary parents in Papua New Guinea – but she died the mother of three young boys and the wife of a very caring man. It was an extremely sad but beautiful funeral. A friend had spent hours putting together an emotionally-charged pictorial record of her short life. We laughed and we cried. We gained new insights into her life as the layers of her personality were shared with us. She may have only been 42, but she had made an impact and was remembered for her beauty of character and her love of Jesus. She was courageous in her fight to face the harsh treatments of chemotherapy and she longed to be healed. She was also courageous as she faced her ever-worsening condition and slipped to her rest in the arms of Jesus.

Eileen was 92 years old, the mother of a work colleague. Again we were fascinated by the pictorial record of her life. We recalled her grief at losing her own daughter, leaving her to become “mother” to three very young children. Those grandchildren were present with children of their own. It was a sad day, but her life had been long and rich and her family gathered together to give thanks for a wonderful

mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. Precious memories of a life lived well in Jesus.

As I sat in the church on those two occasions I pondered what might be said about me at my funeral. Would I be remembered for acts of love and kindness and generosity? Would I be remembered for my faith in times of trial?

They were sobering thoughts.

End #2

(You may be able to personalise your introduction with recollections of your own thoughts.)

Overview of Scripture passage from Esther (suggest that people follow this passage in their Bibles while you present this next section)

Somewhere in the ancient kingdom of Persia, now the kingdom of Iraq, there must be a headstone that tells us something more about the Persian queen, Vashti. Scripture tells us very little, but I would love to have met this lady.

We know she was stunningly beautiful. Probably very young. She held grace and poise—was deep of thought and courageous—but perhaps we know her best as a woman who disobeyed her husband's request.

We know a lot more about her successor, Queen Esther, and based on that information we can have some insight into the customs of her day. Vashti was chosen from the young women, possibly teenagers of the kingdom of Persia to become the queen to King Ahasuerus, or Xerxes the Great, probably around 486 - 483 BC. The king's commissioners in each province were sent in search in all the provinces in Persia and Media for the most beautiful virgins and to bring them to the king's harem where for months they would undergo beauty treatments that would make us ladies purr—or perhaps bleat, for one of the treatments was regular bathing in goat's milk! That therapy presents quite a concept in a Middle Eastern summer!

Plucked from obscurity, the young queen Vashti lived in absolute luxury in the palace where she had everything a Persian teenage girl could dream of. That is, until you ponder her situation. While she was the most powerful woman in the Middle East, we find she had no legal rights against the harsh decree of her husband.

Her husband Xerxes, was a proud and impulsive man. His successes had gone to his head. His harem was large. The virgins chosen for this dubious honour lived in a separate building to the palace. Their sole purpose was to serve the king and to await his call for sexual pleasure. They were guarded

and cared for by the king's eunuchs. These beauties of the Persian empire were safe in their hands for these men had been castrated in order to prevent them from having children and then rebelling against the king and to try to establish a dynasty of their own.

I can't help but wonder what these young women did all day. Virtual prisoners of the king, they had no opportunity to make homes of their own. I guess each girl hoped that she could bear a child to the king; for no doubt that would bring her favour and she would have a child to love and care for. We see this culture better today through the Muslim religion. Although it began over a thousand years after Vasti's time; and so we can have some appreciation for the fact that these beautiful young teenage girls became possessions of the palace.

There is so much we don't know, but so much we can imagine.

But this we do know -

In the third year of his reign Xerxes decided to call his nobles and officials together for a banquet. This was to be a show of strength and power and a call to war, as Xerxes planned to overtake Greece and further add to his wealth. The Empire of Persia was vast, spreading over the modern-day countries of Turkey, Iraq, Iran, Pakistan, Jordan, Lebanon, Israel, and parts of Egypt, Sudan, Libya, and Saudi Arabia. The military leaders of Persia and Media came, along with the princes and nobles of the provinces. Xerxes had inherited this Empire from his father Darius, but Greece was yet to be conquered. Athens, the capital of Greece, was in its classical glory during this time and they were celebrating the seventy-ninth Ancient Olympic games. For 180 days (that's 6 months) Xerxes displayed the vast wealth of his kingdom and the splendor and glory of his majesty; flaunting his wealth by even encrusting his beard with precious stones and jewels. In a great road show, he paraded these officials around the empire, and you can imagine the impact this would have had on the citizens. A show of strength and solidarity.

At the end of the 180 days, in the final week, Xerxes threw a party that lasted 7 days. It was held in the winter palace at Susa. We have read about the interior decorations and the lavish menu.

Each guest was allowed to drink as much as he liked.

At the same time Queen Vashti was hostess to a party for the women in another part of the palace and, as the week drew to a close, Vashti was requested to appear at the king's party in order that the king could display yet another possession – his beautiful queen—in her royal crown—for she was lovely to look at. Notice Scripture only mentions her crown and not her gown!

Jewish tradition ventures that this request came to Vashti because of an argument among the men at the feast as to which country had the most beautiful women. Xerxes decided to settle the issue by putting his wife on public display.

The men were drunk and Vashti said “no!” She had no intention of parading herself like a prized cow in front of a herd of drunken men.

Now it was against Persian custom for a woman to appear before a public gathering of males—which is still a custom in the Muslim world today. It is also said that she may have been pregnant at the time and did not wish to parade in that state—but whatever may have influenced her decision she chose a dangerous path. She knew that defying the king could bring down his wrath, but she chose to respect herself and not to degrade her womanhood by bringing gratification to this drunken mob. I think she must have had a good idea of the reaction she would have received if she had gone into that banquet hall.

Xerxes was humiliated by her response and burned with anger. (Verses 12 –18)

Xerxes consulted his lawyers – and followed their advice.

Vashti was to be banished from the presence of the king; she would be de-throned, her title stripped. Within moments she was banished by Xerxes’ irrevocable decree and could never come into the presence of the king again.

Xerxes request was unreasonable and wrong, but history’s profile of the man shows him to be an unreasonable and foolish man in many cases. Once, we are told, he executed the builders of a bridge because an ocean storm destroyed it; then he commanded that the sea be whipped and chained to punish the sea! He was a man so estranged from his Creator that he thought he could control creation.

But, it seems that after Xerxes had sobered down he came to his senses and remembered his beautiful queen. I suspect that he was sorry he had taken Memucan’s advice. His courtiers must have sensed his depression because their answer to his bad decision was just to begin searching for another beautiful young virgin and Esther enters the scene.

And Vashti vanishes back into obscurity and Scripture never mentions her again. But scripture does record her brief years as queen and therein lies a lesson for me–

Vashti a woman of courage who was prepared to give up everything in honor of her own personal principles. I don’t know if she had heard about the God of Abraham and the value He places on the

human soul—it is possible that she may have learned something of Him through the many Hebrew captives throughout Persia. But I am challenged by her courage and integrity and hope that I could be remembered for the same.

Courage and Integrity – two words I could place in my epitaph. And in today's world it takes courage to practice integrity.

The world is desperately in need of women and men of courage and integrity. Integrity takes time to develop. Integrity comes when you keep doing what you know you are supposed to do, whether anyone is watching or not. That kind of discipline brings inner affirmation. The truth always sets us free. A free conscience is inner peace, undisturbed sleep at night, a reason to hold our heads high, to laugh often, and to be able to accept ourselves. When you are consistent in living in truth, it will have an impact in producing a godly character that the Lord will approve of and others will recognise and trust.

As Seventh-day Adventist Christians does the world see us as being in the world but not of the world? Are we seen as people of courage and integrity? Are we allowing God to refine us or are we being molded by the world and its seductive influences?

My young friends, young women and young men, listen up! God wants you to have fun, but not at the expense of your soul or your safety. He has big plans for you. Don't do anything that will rob you of inner peace and undisturbed sleep at night. Keep yourselves pure—ask God to help you make the right choices to spare you the pain of living with the consequences of bad decisions. But listen again, God is always there waiting to forgive you. He will never give up on you!

Now back to my tomb stone –

I would like to be remembered for the qualities in [Romans 12:9-21 \(READ\)](#)

That's how He wants us to live while we wait for His coming!

I would also like to be remembered for the qualities in [1 Corinthians 1:4 \(READ\)](#)

I would love to be remembered as a woman of grace, not as the world sees grace, but being filled with God's grace. Doing His bidding; speaking out for Him. Living His will.

I would like to be remembered for the qualities on [Galatians 6:14 \(READ\)](#).

The world is full of enticements. Daily we are confronted with subtle cultural pressures and overt propaganda. The only way to escape these destructive influences is to ask God to help crucify our interest in them, just as Paul did.

We can have these qualities in our lives today as we daily seek the presence of Jesus; as we allow Him to remove from us the ragged clothes of sin and replace them with the beauty of the garments of His righteousness.

Take time each day to examine your heart. Ask the Lord to show you the areas where you lack integrity. Then ask God to give you a healthy fear of Him, for “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” Proverbs 9:10. In your desire to please God your heart will be opened to the Holy Spirit’s promptings and you will learn wisdom to conduct yourself with Godly integrity.

I would like to believe that Xerxes was humbled by the decision of Vashti to honour her own integrity—for integrity is truth and the ability to live in it.

Not for one moment denying the influence of the Holy Spirit on Xerxes’ heart when Esther entered his throne room unannounced, but Xerxes may have learned a great lesson from the exile of Vashti and not wanted to repeat this mistake for his heart was receptive to Esther’s plea for God’s people.

I like stories that have happy endings and it would be nice if Vashti’s story had ended with perhaps a restoration to the palace or a mention that she became a Mother Teresa or a Princess Diana as she worked for the needy of the world. Instead her story tells us that this world does not always honour integrity—but heaven does—and let us never lose sight of that ultimate ending to the story of each human being.

As we daily choose to walk the path of integrity let the words of Hebrews 12:1-2 cheer us along:

“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith.”

Let us be women and men of courage, whose faith in Jesus Christ can give us the will and determination to refuse the moments of worldly glory in preference to living in a glorious world.

We will be remembered as we are known, so let us be known now as we would like to be remembered—people of integrity and courage.

CONCLUSION #1

At the christening for their newborn a young wife told the pastor, "My husband wants to name him after his dad and I want to name him after mine."

The pastor said, "What's your dad's name?"

"Joseph," she replied.

"What's your husband's father's name?" he asked.

"Joseph," she said again. "Then what's the problem?"

The husband replied, "Well, her dad's a criminal and mine's a respected Christian. How will people know which one he's named after?" "That's easy," the pastor said, "Call him Joseph and see which one he turns out like. That way everybody will know whose name he carries."

CONCLUSION #2

St. Francis once took a young monk with him to preach in town. But when they arrived they just chatted with vendors and talked to people on the street. Returning home, the novice asked St. Francis why they hadn't preached. St Francis replied, "People listened; they observed our attitude and—that was our message."

Peter writes: "Put on the apron of humility, to serve one another" 1 Peter 5:5 TEV. Remember, it's one thing to call yourself a Christian - it's another, when those who know you agree!

That's how Jesus wants us to live while we wait for His soon return.

