

STARDEW VALLEY +++

PASTOR GREG GRIFFITH

To continue as we get into this and use your booklets there and we're gonna see how Game On lives in the life of Esther through you and through the video game Stardew Valley.

Now you might be saying to yourself, Stardew Valley? Like I've never heard of that game. Yeah see it doesn't doesn't matter how old you are I've talked to young people I've talked to older people and it feels like no one's heard of Stardew Valley. But let me tell you Stardew Valley actually is popular. Over 50 million people are playing Stardew Valley. It is a what they call life simulation game. That's a five billion dollar industry and so it is out there.

And you might be asking yourself so if you've never heard of it and you've never heard of it like how do we have Stardew Valley as one of our games? You know it's really hard to be a pastor's kid and every once in a while a pastor's kid gets a small perk and this perk was my oldest daughter Macy said dad you've got to do for Game On this year Stardew Valley and I said what what is that and I like thought it was spaceship stuff and she's like you got to do it I play it all the time it's a great game you got to do it and I said well let me see if I can figure this out and figure how it works into the life of Esther and so that is why we are doing Stardew Valley because my daughter's one of the 50 million people that plays this frequently and is now introducing it to you and you're going to get to see Esther through it as well.

You know as we think back to where were we last week remember Esther was planted into a place where she didn't want to go. She was an orphan she was now an exile into the city of Susa and she is not there where she wants to be and we saw last week how God not only adopted her but he's positioning her for greater things to come and today where we take off is we continue to take off with where is God using you in a season that you didn't expect? Where is he going to use you in a season that you never expected?

So today we're going to go through four things. First you were placed. You were placed purposely in that spot. Second you are rooted there to produce peace. Third in that unexpected season you will build friendships with purpose and your friendship will be with purpose. And fourth, and this is hard, the ordinary days are the point. The ordinary days are the point. It's good to be bored is what we're going to get to.

Alright so in Stardew Valley every farm starts the same way. Overgrown, unfamiliar, not of your own design. Esther is now in a palace and her life the same. Overgrown, unfamiliar, not designed this way. And for you and for me there are seasons where we get into them and we say I don't want to be here. Everything's overwhelming. It's not what I would design or what I planned and it's not where I want to be at.

So Stardew Valley begins where you start the very first day of the game. You've inherited your grandpa's farm. But don't think of it as like oh yay a working running farm. There's nothing in it. It's a small tiny cabin with a bed, a table, a window, and maybe one living plant. And you walk out and

there's trees and there's bushes and there's rocks. And you have an axe. You've got an axe pick and you've got a hoe to go till the ground. And you've got a watering can. And you've inherited into this farm and now you've got to build a farmland. And that's how you begin.

Esther in Esther 2:8 when the king's order and edict had been proclaimed many young women were brought to the citadel of Susa and put under the care of Haggai. Esther also was taken, everyone everywhere say taken, to the king's palace and entrusted to Haggai who had charge of the harem.

You see notice this. She didn't want to go there. She didn't say sign me up. I want to be in a palace. I want to be entrusted to Haggai. I want to be a part of a harem. She was placed there. She was taken there.

So 26 years ago when I started at the seminary we had a in week two they would give you a fieldwork assignment. And it was at that fieldwork church that you were to show up every Sunday. And a lot of my friends got these pretty cool churches. Like one of them got one of the largest and more prestigious churches in the city. It was growing. It was doing innovative stuff. It was dynamic. And I remember as as you're waiting and you're anticipating you know these these assignments are coming you're like I can't wait. We would talk about that. We were like who gets there. And they would usually get like five to seven seminarians. And a few of my friends were placed there.

And I was talking to one of them who was placed there. And I said what's it like? And he goes it's okay. And I said what do you mean? He said well here's what happened. When we showed up they told us okay first-year seminarians you're here at 7 a.m. every single Sunday. You're going to show up. And you're going to shut up. Meaning this. Just walk around. Observe. Don't give honest feedback right now. Just take it in. Later on we'll ask for questions. We'll ask for thoughts. But you're not here to judge us or fix us or tell us how you think we should do ministry. Just observe and learn.

And then he said and then if we get to year two they said you'll probably get to do some readings on Sunday morning. Now I was like all right it's field placement day. I'm so excited. I get my envelope because they just gave us all envelopes. And I open it up and it says fieldwork assignment. Unity Lutheran Church East St. Louis, Illinois.

Now this is 2000. I didn't do the study today but in 2000 East St. Louis was chosen by the FBI and the Police Association as the world's most dangerous city. More dangerous than Detroit which I'd go to four years later. So Omaha something's coming. More dangerous than Compton LA. More dangerous than Chicago. More dangerous than New York.

And when I got there we had a second year guy named Travis and then another first year guy Josh. And the pastor who was there he said guys I'm so excited you're here. He said this is the first time ever that we've been awarded two first-year seminarians. And he said every Sunday you're going to show up at 7. Church will start at 9. We were also it was an African-American inner-city church so it started officially at 9 but we didn't actually start church until everyone showed up.

And when I say everyone it was a worshipping congregation of 12. So us seminarians we increased the attendance by 25%. They had great church growth that year. It's not where I would have chosen. We were placed.

I want you to think right now has there been a season in your life that you wouldn't have chosen? Has there been a health issue that you would go I never would choose to deal with Parkinson's, Alzheimer's, deal with my mom getting cancer or my dad starting to be diagnosed with early-onset dementia?

Is there a season in your life where you're thinking I hate my job. My boss is not kind. My co-workers don't do the work that I do. Or maybe it's I've hired someone new and they're just a struggle. Culturally this is terrible and I'm starting to count down the days to retirement. Maybe you're a season in your life where you're going my marriage is not what I thought it would be on day one. Marriage is hard. We find ourselves in a constant struggle, in a constant battle.

Maybe you're in a season of parenting where you're just going of course I have to love my children but do I have to like them? That's real. Or maybe you're in a season where you're just saying I'm not sure the purpose and the point. And it's a hard season that you never wanted to be in.

You see, just like Esther has been taken and placed in nothing that she ever would have said, this is what I want to do. There are seasons in our lives where we are taken and placed, where we're put. And it's gonna be hard.

Peter writes about this in his first letter when he says, I urge you as foreigners and exiles live such good lives among the pagans that they may see your good deeds and glorify God. And so what we're reminded of, just like Esther. Esther didn't quit. She didn't give up. She didn't say I'm done. She didn't say this is terrible. She didn't go woe is me.

We see nothing in there. Don't forget Esther is a book where she doesn't even mention the name of God. Her and Song of Solomon are the only two books in the scriptures that never use the name of God. So we don't see a lamenting cry out. What we see is faithfulness showing up day in, day out. Faithfulness.

So as you inherit this farm, your first day, you wake up, you jump out of bed, and you walk out of your little tiny cabin, and you just begin to work. You got to clear the overgrowth.

And what you also discover as you start clearing the overgrowth is you start meeting people in the town. And you try to go to the city bus system where it tells you this is for transportation, and then it said the bus system doesn't work anymore.

And you go and you meet people, and they're they're like, oh you inherited that farm. That farm is no good. And then you meet people, and they're like, and they're just like, this is not a great town. I like to go fishing, but there aren't any fish. I mean it's like living with Eeyore in this game. And every single one of them is the Saturday Night Live skit Debbie Downer, right?

But what you're realizing is that you are there in this game to produce peace. That the more you work, the more you do things, the more you you keep showing up and do things, the people start finding peace. They start finding peace that there's hope for this little town, this little city, this farm that you've inherited.

In Esther 3:8-9, Haman says to the king Xerxes, there's a certain people, the Jews, dispersed amongst the people in all the province in your kingdom, and they keep to themselves separately. Their customs are different from those of all the other people, and they don't obey the king's laws.

By the way, this is him just going, hey king, get mad, because you've got laws, and these foreigners, they're not following any of them. Get angry king.

Like right now, the king, everything inside of him is welling up in anger. He's got that inner turmoil that's in him. And he says, Haman says, and sir king, it's in your best interest to not tolerate them.

If it pleases you king, let a decree be issued to destroy them, and I will give ten thousand talents of silver to the king's administrators for the royal treasury.

So Haman says, hey king, there's these Jews in this city, and they don't actually listen to you. They don't follow you. Matter of fact, they don't even want to be here. They keep separate from everything. They do their own thing. They do their own way.

And king, by the way, you shouldn't tolerate this. If you're a king and mighty and powerful, you should destroy them. Like show them, let them be a lesson to everyone that knows they don't mess with you Xerxes.

Oh, and if you would like, I'll do it for you. I'll kill all of them, plus I will pay ten thousand dollars to your treasury. It's a win-win-win, before Michael Scott stated that phrase, right? I mean, at this point, why wouldn't he do this? And so he says, let it be.

And as Esther shares this with her cousin Mordecai in 4:12 through 14, he sends her the answer and says, don't think because you are in the king's house, you alone of all the Jews will escape. For you need to 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 a royal position for, everyone say this together with me, such a time.

Matter of fact, you may want to write that note down in week two. Such a time as this.

Esther is placed to produce peace. She's planted to produce peace for such a time as this, when there is disharmony, discord and destruction that is being plotted against her people.

So I showed up one Sunday at 7am, and it was my Sunday that I was supposed to do all the liturgy so our pastor could preach. And he was a really great Lutheran Baptist pastor. And that, I mean, he would bring it. He'd be down in the pulpit. He'd bring it. It's 45 minutes of him just sharing.

And I grew up in like typical Lutheran 15 minute messages, right? So I'm like sitting there. None of you knew that, by the way. Typical Lutheran messages are 15 minutes, not at King of Kings. But he'd bring it, and he'd have his handkerchief, and he'd be wiping and everything.

So this Sunday, I show up. And I got to be honest, I didn't always understand him. I didn't always understand where he's going. Sometimes he talked too fast. Sometimes he talked too low. Sometimes I just felt like I couldn't get what the words were.

And I show up, and it's about 7:30 in the morning. And he comes to me, and he arrives, and he points his finger at me, and he calls me over. And I come over, and he puts his hand on me, and he goes, Greg. He goes, I don't feel so good today. And he said, so when I'm preaching, if I have to leave, you just stand up and take off where I left off.

I thought, come on, you've got to be kidding. I haven't even done homiletics yet. I don't even know.

He goes, no, no, I'm serious. Now, here's what we learned later. And I have so much respect for this man who's now with the Lord. But he was our vacancy pastor at Unity in East St. Louis. And he was serving there amidst the fact that he was battling esophageal and tongue cancer.

And so I couldn't understand him always, because the radiation and the chemo would produce sores on his tongue, or swollen, or the chemo on that Sunday was so bad that he was throwing up most of the morning.

And he was saying, if I'm preaching and I need to throw up, I need to move.

And I thought to myself, and I still think 26 years later to myself, what a man of God that he said, amidst my most unwanted season I'll ever be in, I will not let 12 people not hear the gospel each and every Sunday. I will bring it.

And that Sunday, I produced peace with him, because he knew it would be okay. He knew there were people to help him.

I now understood why this church got two first-year seminarians for the very first time.

In your unexpected seasons, you have been planted to produce peace.

Esther showed up, and she came each week, and she brought peace amidst the harem, peace amidst the palace, peace to her cousin Mordecai, peace amidst the plans to destroy all of the Jews. She was planted there to bring peace and deliverance.

Your season that you're in, it's so tempting amidst a hard season to give up. It's easy to say, I'm done, the marriage is over, I want out. That's not peace. So easy to say, this job, it's terrible, I'm just gonna show up, I'm gonna clock in, clock out, I'm done, I'm not talking to my boss, I'm not talking to the co-workers, I'm not talking to employees.

No, we show up, we bring peace.

In the midst of our most difficult seasons of health, we remain vigilant in the trust of God. We bring peace.

See, it's that showing up and that trust. It's not saying we're happy to be in the hard season, but we don't give up in it. We don't leave it. We don't say that we're alone. We don't get Debbie Downer. We show up and we bring the presence of peace, of trust amidst that time.

So in Stardew Valley, as you're building friendships, there's actually purpose in your relationships.

So you go through the town and you get to meet people and then they tell you little things and they begin to build trust with you.

And actually, when you start, you can just like walk into their house and you can't get very far in their house. But as you build those relationships, as you continue to pour into them, and as you continue to do the things that you're supposed to do for your own little farm, like their trust level goes up with you.

And in the midst of all of that, then they begin to open up with you. But also they recognize that they're not alone in this little town anymore. They have you. And you're a part of that life with them.

In Esther 2:15 and 17, the turn comes for Esther, the young woman Mordecai, who had adopted the daughter of his uncle Abihai, to go to the king.

And she asked nothing other than what Haggai, the king's eunuch who was in charge of the harem, suggested.

And Esther won the favor of everyone. Everyone everywhere say favor of everyone.

This is not hyperbole. Esther was well-liked.

And she was taken to King Xerxes in the royal residence in the twelfth, tenth month of the month of Tabith in the seventh year of his reign.

Now the king was attracted to Esther more than any other of the women. She won his favor and approval more than any other virgins.

So he set a royal crown on her head and made her the queen instead of Vishti.

Esther now is the queen of this land as a Jew, and she has the ear of the king.

And in 5:1 through 3, on the third day, everyone say on the third day.

Golly, can I just say it again? I said it last week.

Here's the deal. Like, it's harder to not see Jesus throughout the scriptures than it is to see him. You have to have more faith not to see.

On the third day, Esther puts on her royal robes.

Does this not scream to you and to me the third day of the resurrection of Jesus Christ where he wears his royal robes and stands in victory over sin, death, and the devil and delivers you and me?

She is now the queen with royal robes set and primed to deliver the people from destruction.

And when he sees the queen standing there in the court, he was pleased with her, held out to her the gold scepter that was in his hand.

Esther approached, touched the tip of the scepter, and the king said, what is it, queen? What is your request? Even up to half the kingdom will be given to you.

See, Esther has earned this great favor because she's continued to show up and build these amazing relationships.

Character in the hidden places prepares you for the visible ones.

He knows her personage. He knows her steadiness.

And Esther, she didn't campaign for the crown. She didn't sneak and she didn't say, I've got to do something. Let me figure this out. Let me be the best of the king.

No, she just simply trusted.

She just showed up.

She just befriended everyone who met her.

She was just kind.

I want you to think about in a difficult season, who were the friends that you were gathered around, that you built those relationships with, whatever that difficult season is, or maybe it's right now.

I want to invite you everywhere.

Take out your phone and just send them a text saying, thank you for being there for me in good and in tough times.

Go ahead, do it. Text them.

It's fine.

Take your phone out, text them.

Watch what happens as you build that friendship and that relationship.

Watch what happens, not only for you as you remember how great it was to have them in your favor during that tough time, but also watch how much they rejoice in recognizing that you know what a blessing they were and you are in that difficult season.

Who are those people that you just knew were standing shoulder to shoulder, were carrying you, were being a picture of Jesus to you?

Because it wasn't about what you did.

It's just simply about who you are.

Favor is about who we actually are, what we show up, even in the hard times, right?

Adversity reveals character, right?

And so lastly in Stardew Valley, like here's what you do every day.

You step out every single day of your cabin and you water the crops and every crop you plant needs to be individually watered and you're just going boom, boom, boom, boom, boom and you just show up and you just water the crops.

Then you harvest them when they grow.

Then you go to the store, you buy more seed, you say hi to a few people, you do some fishing, you do these things and then you go back and you plant your seeds and you water your crops and then eventually you get a dog and you pet your dog and it pants and a little heart shows up and then it becomes 9:25 and you're out of energy and you have to just slowly go to the bed and then, oh, you forgot to check the mail so make sure you check the mail.

Does this not sound like life?

You see, it's the ordinary that we were designed to live in.

We want to think about the big things and the celebrations and the milestones and the mountaintops but if you've ever been to the summit of a mountaintop, a 14er, I can only, I've only gotten to 13ers but the 14ers, I've even heard like at the very top of the 14, there's no growth.

They're nice but you're designed to live in the valley.

You're designed to live in the mundane.

Ecclesiastes writes this about this, whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might for in the realm of the dead where you're going, there's neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

It just means that you show up and you do the hard things every day and Josh, Travis and myself, we just showed up to unity every Tuesday for after-school camp, every Saturday for sports camp and every Sunday for church.

For two years, just showed up all three of those days of the week doing the same thing.

You see, what happens in the unexpected seasons like Esther, like you and like me is that we just continue to live the ordinary, trusting in God, trusting in his deliverance, trusting and knowing that this hard season isn't forever, that there's better days ahead but we're just gonna keep showing up every single day.

And those hard seasons, I love it in the book of Esther, right, like the hard season she talks about, it's actually just one verse.

She talks about it and that's one year of time and you have this, the hard seasons, when I had cancer.

Oh, this job I had one time.

Oh man, remember that month or that year of marriage?

Remember parenting?

Oh, that was hard but you don't dwell on it.

Those days were long those days were long but the reflection is short and so we just keep showing up to do good.

This is what Paul writes in Galatians 6:9, let us not become weary in doing good for at the proper time we will reap a harvest and everyone say this everywhere with me, if we do not give up and that's that's the Stardew Valley, that's the life of Esther, that's your life and my life.

Inheriting where we don't always want to be, planted for peace, building relationships with purpose, with purpose and just doing the ordinary day of showing up and trusting in our great God today, tomorrow and forever.

Will you pray with me?

Heavenly Father, thank you.

Thank you so much for each day when you just showed up, when you walked this life.

Thank you Lord Jesus for walking that life and living that life and dying for us and rising for us and on that third day putting on the royal robes and showing to us in the life of Esther deliverance of her people then and in the life of you Jesus deliverance for your people of all time.

So let us be faithful, faithful in showing up each day.

Planted, rooted, building and being who you've called us to be in good seasons and in unexpected ones today, tomorrow and forever and all of God's people everywhere said amen.