

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

## Daily Devotional Companion

### Week 3

**Day 15.** Read Genesis 31.17-32.12; Matthew 10.26-11.6;  
Psalm 13.1-6; Proverbs 3.16-18.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Genesis:** Things haven't changed much for Jacob. Jacob flees from his father-in-law, as once he fled from his brother, Esau. He sends messengers to Esau, hoping "that I may find favor in your eyes." The messengers deliver an ominous report: Esau is coming to meet Jacob with 400 men. Fearing the worst and always calculating, Jacob divides his great possessions and large family into two groups, hoping that if one group is attacked the other may escape. Then, almost as an afterthought, he prays, "Save me, I pray, from the hand of my brother, Esau" and reminds God of his promise. **Questions:** 1. Why is it that I pray most fervently with my "back to the wall?" 2. In times of trouble, short prayers—simple cries like "help me, God"—are best. Why does God love it whenever we pray, and especially such prayers? 3. What am I most afraid of in my life right now?

**Matthew:** Jesus bids his followers not to fear those who can kill the body but cannot kill the soul. His coming will not bring peace on earth, he says, but division, depending on how people respond to him, his message, and mission. Even John the Baptizer sends his disciples asking, "Are you the one?" Jesus says anyone who loves even father or mother more than him is not worthy of him, and anyone who does not take up his or her cross and follow him is not worthy of him." Whoever acknowledges Jesus before others, Jesus promises to acknowledge before his Father in heaven. **Questions:** 1. Who is number one in my life? Whose affection do I fear losing for following Jesus? 2. What does it mean to acknowledge Jesus before others? 3. Who among the people I know can perceive by my words and actions that I follow Jesus? Who doesn't? How can I lovingly "acknowledge" Jesus before them?

**Prayer:** God, so often I am fearful and timid. Yet, you love me none the less. Make me bold to acknowledge your Son, Jesus, in all my relationships, in a way that will best win their own faith and following of Jesus. Amen.

## **Day 16.** Read Genesis 32.12–34.31; Matthew 11.7-30; Psalm 14.1-7; Proverbs 3.19-20.

### **Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:**

**Genesis:** Jacob wrestles with the demons of his past wrongdoings, which seem about to catch up to him with a vengeance. In a dark night, both of the physical and the spiritual kinds, he wrestles with God, and is given a new name, Israel, which means something akin to “one who contends with God.” Following his close encounter with God, Jacob is forever changed, as shown by the limp he suffered ever after. His encounter with the brother he cheated, Esau, is almost as big a surprise to Jacob as his one with God. Reminiscent of Jesus’ story of the father receiving his wayward son back home, and of the forgiving love of God in Christ Jesus that seeks the sinner to be reconciled, Esau runs to meet Jacob, embraces him, and even kisses him. **Questions:** 1. What is the darkest “night of the soul” I have experienced, the time during which I struggled most with God’s presence and call (or seeming absence and abandonment) in my life? How did it change my relationship with God? Weaken or strengthen it? Why? How? 2. When and from whom have I experienced forgiveness and reconciliation as Jacob did from Esau? 3. Do I really believe I am truly and completely reconciled to God through Christ? Do I still struggle with this, still contending with God over the reality that I am forgiven fully and reconciled forever?

**Matthew:** Jesus thanks God for revealing his compassion and truth to those who are childlike and simply accepting of the gift, without earning it or deserving it because of their own actions or cleverness. By making reconciliation available simply “by grace through faith” it is truly available to everyone. In words that must have seemed incredibly arrogant and even blasphemous to his hearers, Jesus invites, “Come to me, all you who labor and are heavily burdened, and I will give you rest.” The wholeness and fullness of life we desire is only found through him. There is only one condition: enter into a lifelong relationship with this one who loves us so, who invites us, and who promises to walk beside us and share the burdens we will face, even as two oxen bear a yoke together. We are to become his disciples, and follow his leading, all our lives. **Questions:** 1. Have I really heard Jesus call and invite me personally to walk together and experience true peace and rest of spirit as he only can give? 2. What hindrances get in the way of “taking the yoke” of Jesus and walking as his disciple? 3. What most upsets the inner peace I have in Christ currently? How can I let him carry that burden for me, since we share the yoke together?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus Christ, can it be that you want to walk with me day by day, through all the bright highpoints and dark valleys of my life? Do you really care about every part and parcel of my existence, not just what I think is spiritual and significant. Yet, this is your promise. This is your invitation. Lord, let me come to you and be wholly yours.

Let me walk with you and be your disciple all day, every day. This alone will fulfill the deepest desire of my heart. This is the true goal and purpose of my life. Amen.

## Day 17. Read Genesis 35.1–36.43; Matthew 12.1-21; Psalm 15.1-5; Proverbs 3.21-26.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Genesis:** The change in Jacob's (now Israel) life shows itself in wholehearted devotion to God. He calls everyone in his family to put aside all other loyalties, too, as shown in burying their idols, building an altar to God, and worshiping God alone. God renews the promise to Israel yet again in another personal encounter. Rebecca, dying in childbirth, wants to name her son "child of sorrow," but Jacob, even in his grief, doesn't saddle him with that burden, naming him Benjamin, "son of my right hand." The long genealogy that follows traces the family of Esau, showing that, even though not the chosen one through whom will come ultimately the Savior of the world, all people are precious to God. **Questions:** 1. How has my life changed since I heard the good news of God's reconciliation with me in Christ Jesus? Can others see a change? 2. What idols (people or things) did I rely upon and trust in before accepting God's Lordship alone? Have I put them all away, or are there some I still can't let go? 2. How does it make me feel (and act) to know that God says I am no longer a "child of sorrow" but the child of his "right hand" because of his Son sacrificing himself for me?

**Matthew:** Jesus quickly earns the criticism of religious authorities because of his seeming disregard for the customs and conventions people have placed around a relationship with God, however well-intended. God desires acts of compassion, not rituals and rules, Jesus says, quoting the Old Testament: "'I want you to be merciful; I don't want your sacrifices.'" When he heals a man with a withered hand on the day of worship, the strictest religious people of the day, called Pharisees, gather together and discuss plans to put him out of the picture permanently, thinking, no doubt, they are doing God a favor and following his will. **Questions:** 1. What would Jesus think of my church and our way of "following" him today? Would he say we are stronger on the "mercy" (acts of kindness, service and witness) or "sacrifice" (rituals and rules) side? 2. Where do I have conflict with what Jesus asks of me personally? Would I rather restrict my relationship with God to one hour a week during worship and avoid his call to compassionate service and witness day by day? Why?

**Prayer:** Jesus, my old nature wants to keep things comfortable and controllable. It's so safe to follow you when I think that means attending worship once a week, or praying my shopping list of needs to you in the quiet sanctuary of my home. Oh, even that isn't easy, I admit. But it's another thing entirely to follow you in doing acts of

mercy, service, and witness out in the world, where real people I know have real needs. And they know me so well, with all my shortcomings and failings. Lord Jesus, let me look to you, and remember always the mercy you have shown to me and are continually showing to me. No longer a child of sorrow, but now a child of your right hand, let me practice extending mercy to everyone around me, even as you are merciful to me. Amen.

## Day 18. Read Genesis 37.1–38.30; Matthew 12.22-45; Psalm 16.1-11; Proverbs 3.27-32.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Genesis:** God can and does free us from our sins, but our sins still have consequences. The self-seeking intrigue and deceit Jacob lived in his younger life are passed on to his children, in a family divided by favoritism and jealousy. Jacob loves Joseph above his eleven brothers, and with incredibly flagrant insensitivity, shows it by giving Joseph a special coat of many colors (or with long sleeves—very rare in the Middle East of the day). To make matters worse, God gives a special gift to Joseph—dreams and their interpretation—and Joseph tells his brothers the dreams, which predict one day he will be leader over them all. His brothers respond about as caringly as any brothers would in such a situation: they sell him into slavery, thinking to get him out of the picture, and line their pockets as well. **Questions:** 1. How do I feel when I am the victim of favoritism, in my family, at my work, in my church or community organization? 2. How do I show favoritism toward others in my relationships? 3. Whom would I “sell into slavery,” if the choice were mine? Am I jealous of someone for the gifts God has given them—their abilities, possessions, privileges, promotions, important people around them? What is God’s place and plan in all this difference between person and person?

**Matthew:** The conflict grows worse in Jesus’ life, the more public ministry he accomplishes. When he heals a demon-possessed man who is both deaf and speechless, the strictly religious folk accuse him of casting out demons by Satan, the prince of demons. Jesus responds “Anyone who isn’t for me is against me.” He declares that there is only one unforgivable sin: the sin “against the Holy Spirit.” (that is, unbelief, which means to say Jesus’ works and words are not of God’s Spirit, but of the Evil One). People ask him for a sign that what he says and does are from God. The only sign that generation would see was the sign of Jonah. As Jonah was three days in the belly of the whale, so Jesus, the Son of Man, must be three days in the earth. It is Jesus’ first prediction of his death and resurrection, which he knows full well in advance. **Questions:** 1. Has believing in Jesus and following him caused me to receive ridicule, criticism, or even persecution? If not, is it because I tend to be a “stealth” Christian, a follower of Christ who “flies below the radar” without being visibly a believer? 2. When someone disagrees with me in matters of faith, do I tend to jump to the conclusion they

disagree for “unholy” reasons, suggesting they are motivated by less than Christian ideals or values?

**Prayer:** Lord, when I am maligned, let me receive it as graciously as Christ did. Let me not leap to the conclusion that others are speaking or acting in bad faith, for in leaping there, I will so often find no place to land or stand. Where others are being criticized or persecuted for following Christ—or for any wrongful reason—let me stand beside them. Amen.

**Day 19.** Read Genesis 39.1-41.16; Matthew 12.46-13.23;  
Psalm 17.1-15; Proverbs 3.33-35.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Genesis:** Joseph’s outward circumstances go from bad to worse, from being made a slave to being a slave wrongly imprisoned for attempted rape. Yet as a slave, and even as a prisoner, Joseph relies upon God and demonstrates the faithful character of a follower of God. Joseph does not wallow in self-pity or become self-absorbed, but is still sensitive to the sufferings of his fellow prisoners. Using the gift God has given him, Joseph interprets the dreams of fellow prisoners to help them in their confusion. **Questions:** 1. What causes me to become self-absorbed, so that I become insensitive to the sufferings or needs of others? What in my circumstances today is causing me to doubt God’s loving me or being in control of my life and arranging things for my good? 2. Who around me is in need right now, that I can help using the gifts and resources God has entrusted to me? What is one specific thing I can do this week to help them?

**Matthew:** Who is in and who is out? Jesus surprises everyone, including his own family, when he asks, “who is my mother and who are my brothers and sisters?” His answer: “whoever does the will of the Father in heaven.” Jesus tells a story of God’s extravagance in welcoming all. He’s like a farmer who scatters seed everywhere—on the path, in the rocks, even amongst the weeds. His actions seem wasteful, almost careless. But behind it all is the desire that everyone receive the gift God wants to give—reconciliation and life with God through his Word made flesh, Jesus Christ, God’s Son. **Questions:** 1. Whom do I tend to exclude, either in my thinking or my actions, from being part of God’s kingdom, either consciously or unconsciously? Whom do I overlook or avoid sharing God’s love with? People of different cultures or languages? Divorced people? People of different sexual orientation? Single people? 2. What group or groups of people does my church tend to favor? Exclude? 3. How do the cares of the world choke my faith and spiritual growth? How does the Evil One attack me to take away what God gives me? How does wanting to “fit in” and avoid standing out or being criticized for being a Christ-follower choke my growth and fruitfulness for God? 4. How can I be more open and receptive to God’s Word transforming me?

**Prayer:** O God, deliver me most of all from self-pity and self-absorption. Why am I so eager to find fault and so slow to forgive? Why does wrong done by another toward me fester in me so, and the wrong I do others get so easily forgotten? Turn me inside out, so I live not toward myself but toward you and other people. Let me not show favoritism for those who are like me or whom I like. Let me not exclude those who are from me, or whom I dislike. Let me love you with my whole heart, mind, strength and soul. Let me love my neighbor as myself, which means as if they are the most precious persons in the world to me. Amen.

**Day 20.** Read Genesis 41.17-42.17; Matthew 13.24-46;  
Psalm 18.1-15; Proverbs 4.1-6.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Genesis:** First in slavery, then in imprisonment, Joseph trusts God and acts in a godly manner, caring for others above himself. In one day Joseph vaults from prison to palace, becoming the second most powerful ruler in Egypt. Through wise, decisive leadership, he averts catastrophe, saving the people of Egypt from famine. But God is working, unbeknownst to Joseph, to correct an even more difficult disaster: a family divided by envy, hatred and jealousy. His brothers are forced by the famine to seek help, and they come for help, unknowingly, to the very brother they despised and sold into slavery.  
**Questions:** 1. What recent success or achievement have I received? Did I thank God for it, or take credit for it myself, as if I was responsible? 2. What seeming catastrophe or disaster in my life later turned out to be one of the best things ever to happen to me? 3. Why am I prone not to thank God for the difficult things in my life and trust that God is using them for my own good and the good of others? 4. When seeming disaster strikes, do I tend to turn inward toward myself and my own needs, or outwards toward others? What helps me turn outwards towards others?

**Matthew:** God casts his invitation to life in relationship with him abroad like seed, but there is opposition. The Evil One is at work as well, seeking to undermine God's working in the world. He sows seeds of discord and destruction. The world is from all appearances a mish mash of good and evil. Rather than destroy the good with the bad, God will allow both to exist until the end, when the difference will be plain, and the division eternal. The difference is faith: responding to God's invitation in Christ like someone who discovers a treasure hidden in a field, or like a merchant who discovers an incomparable pearl, joyfully committing all they are and have to receive the gift beyond compare.  
**Questions:** 1. What areas of my life are most "weedy" now? 2. Why do I so often tend to forget that relationship with God is the most important thing in my life? 3. What other things (or people) compete with God for first place in my life? What can I do about that?

**Prayer:** God, I find it so hard to thank you for the difficulties and disasters in my life, even though they often turn out ultimately to be times of biggest blessing for me. I so often fail to see opportunity in troubles, and to be grateful for them as they occur. Help to remember and believe, every day, that you are bigger than any trouble I will ever face. Help me to know and trust that, according to your promise, you will never leave me nor forsake me, and that, with you as my God, all things will work together for my good and the good of others in your mysterious, miraculous plan. Amen.

**Day 21.** Read Genesis 42.18-43.34; Matthew 13.47-14.12;  
Psalm 18.16-36; Proverbs 4.7-10.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Genesis:** Joseph is handed the perfect opportunity to take revenge on the brothers who wronged him. Concealing his identity, Joseph decides to test them to see whether they have changed. They must bring their youngest brother, or they cannot come back for more food. Forced by famine, they bring Benjamin. Now Joseph has only to spring the trap, to see what character they have inside. Will the past repeat itself? Will they abandon another brother to slavery, in order to save themselves? **Questions:** 1. When I have been wronged, do I respond with revenge, or actively seek the good of the one who wronged me? 2. Who is my “enemy” right now? How can I show them God’s loving care? 3. When have I abandoned someone to save myself from embarrassment or difficulty? What can I do to right that?

**Matthew:** “Where did this guy get all this wisdom and power from?” ask people who think they know Jesus. They know his family. They saw him grow up. Perhaps they played with Jesus in the streets of Nazareth. Perhaps Jesus spent the night in their home with their own children. They think they know all about him. He must be pretending. It must be a show. Jesus responds that someone sent by God receives respect from everyone except those who think they know him or her—their own family, neighbors, and even friends. Jesus could not work miracles among them because of their disbelief. **Questions:** 1. Are the joy, hope, peace and power of God showing in my life so that people around me are wondering where all that comes from in someone like me? How do I respond? 2. Do I tend to envy or even criticize others who are farther along in their walk with God than I am, doubting their sincerity or reality? Whom do I take for granted? Whom do I have low expectations from and don’t challenge to achieve their potential for Christ? Why? 3. Is it harder for me to share Christ’s love in words and actions with someone I’m very familiar with, or with someone who is relatively distant, like an acquaintance or even a stranger? Whom do I know well who needs Christ’s love in words and actions right now?

Prayer: O Lord, I have abandoned or betrayed those I know and love. I have been abandoned and betrayed. Why ever would I forsake or fail to stand by others as I should, when I myself know the pain of betrayal and abandonment? Yet I do. I don't ask my fellow worker or neighbor what is troubling them when I see they are disturbed. I ask "How are you?" as a convention and am embarrassed when they hint they are hurting. I avoid staying longer, not delving deeper into the darkness and uncertainty of their confusion and pain. Lord, as you stand by me, give me courage and strength always to stand by others, with faithfulness and love. Amen.

## Through The Bible In One Year: Week 3 Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson: Genesis 37.3-11, 18-20  
Psalm 15.1-5

Second Lesson: Matthew 13.54-58  
Theme: God Meets Us In Our Mayhem and Mess