

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 4

Day 22. Read Genesis 44.1-45.28; Matthew 14.13-36;
Psalm 18.37–50; Proverbs 4.11-13.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: Joseph springs his trap. Benjamin is framed and arrested as a thief. His penalty: to become a slave. The brothers are given a choice: go home as free men, leaving their brother behind, or staying with him. One of the very brothers who betrayed Joseph now offers to become a slave in place of Benjamin. God has worked in them to transform them by means of their guilt about Joseph. Celebrating the change, Joseph weeps with joy and embraces his brothers. His brothers are cautious. Will Joseph seek revenge? **Questions:** 1. When have I not stood up for or stood with someone when I should have? What factors tend to make me save my own neck instead of standing tall for my faith and values? 2. Whom do I know that is in a difficult situation now? Who needs someone to stand beside them? How can I stand with them? 2. Do I have a grudge against anyone? Who do I need to forgive? What's stopping me?

Matthew: Trying to withdraw to a quiet place apart, following the violent death of his cousin, John the Baptizer, Jesus is followed by a huge crowd seeking the help he alone can give. He has compassion on them and heals the sick in their midst. When it's late and they're hungry, his followers suggest Jesus send the crowd away. Jesus stuns them: "You give them something to eat!" "Who me?" they respond, "with what?" Jesus, taking five loaves and two fish, offers them with thanks to God and feeds thousands. Amidst a storm on the sea, Jesus comes walking on the water. The disciples are afraid, but Peter says "If it's you, Lord, bid me walk on the water to you." Jesus does, so Peter does—until he takes his eyes off Jesus, distracted by the storm. "Why did you doubt?" Jesus asks, catching him by the hand as he sinks. **Questions:** 1. How often do I ask, "Why me?" or "Who me?" of God, wondering how God could be asking me to do something out of my comfort zone or experience? 2. What "Walking on water" (thing out of my comfort zone) is Jesus calling me to right now? 3. What are the 'wind and waves,' the things that distract or prevent me from following God's risky call with courage right now? 3. Do I believe Jesus is 'bigger' (more powerful) than anything or anyone else in my life? Why don't I always show the courage and confidence knowing him should give?

Prayer: Jesus, I want to come closer to you. I want to approach closer and closer. Why must the way be over the troubled waters, over stormy seas? Can't it be only in placid, peaceful times and places? Why is it I grow closest to you when the wind and waves are at their worst. It is in the midst of broken relations, failed hopes, and insurmountable fears that I find you are Lord over every other power in the universe. Lord, it may be partially a lie to say this, because part of me balks even now, but, thank you for the storms of my life. Thank you for the hurricanes and the havoc. Thank you for reaching out to me in the midst of them, for taking me by the hand, and for lifting me up to you. Even now the waters are way too deep for me, Lord. But not for you. Never for you. Help me keep my eyes on you, whatever comes. Amen.

Day 23. Read Genesis 46.1-47-31; Matthew 15.1-28; Psalm 19.1-14; Proverbs 4.14-19

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: God appears to Jacob (a.k.a. Israel) and tells him not to fear going down into Egypt. Perhaps Jacob balked, because to go to Egypt would mean to leave the land God had promised him and his fathers. Was God changing his mind? Reneging on his promise? God reassures him: it's all part of the Plan, however surprising it seems. So the chosen people, few in number, leave the promised land for a time. Further surprises await them, for an ominous reason: the very best land of Egypt is theirs, because they are shepherds, who were despised in Egyptian society. The seeds of future enslavement are already sown. In yet another surprising turnabout, old and decrepit Jacob, the wanderer and foreigner in Egypt, blesses Pharaoh, the supreme ruler of the land. It is another of the amazing turnabouts God demonstrates throughout the Bible, for God lifts up the lowly, and brings down the prideful and arrogant. God loves the servant, because God loves serving. **Questions:** 1. What surprises has God thrown into my life? When have I had to backtrack from plans I've made, even good plans that should be pleasing to God? 2. Why do I always look for personal advantage, rather than opportunities to serve? 3. Who does God want to bless through me?

Matthew: Religious leaders criticize Jesus for failing to follow the conventions and customs humans have built as barriers about our relationship with God. Jesus responds that they are nullifying the Word of God with their traditions and honoring God with their lips rather than their hearts and actions. "Don't you realize you offended them?" his disciples ask. "Any plant my Father has not planted will be uprooted," Jesus responds. As if to underscore the difference between how God views people and acts, Jesus agrees to the humble persistence of a foreign woman, who begs Jesus to cast the demon from her daughter. "Great is your faith!" Jesus says in amazement. **Questions:** 1. How do I surround Jesus with conventional ideas or customs, even seemingly holy

religious ones, that become barriers to him working in my life? Barriers to his working through my life to touch others? 2. What in my church is just human custom that gets in the way of God acting powerfully through his church? In what ways do we limit people's access to God, especially people outside the church?

Prayer: O God, help to remember you want relationship not religion. You want me—my heart, head and hands—all of me—not just rules and rituals followed grudgingly or from only part of my being. You want to walk and talk with me, intimately, day by day, not just one hour on one day a week. Thank you for such love! You want to be Lord in my home, in my workplace, where I shop and play, not just in a special beautiful building, however holy. Thank you for not settling for religion, and not letting us find true rest until we rest with you in a personal relationship. Holy Lord, be Lord of all I am, wherever I am, for as long as I am! Amen.

Day 24. Read Genesis 48.1-49.33; Matthew 15.29-16.12;
Psalm 20.1-9; Proverbs 4.20-27.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: Words are powerful. They can build up, or break down. They can heal, or they can hurt. They can help, or cause harm. That's why blessings are so important in the Bible. They are like prophecies, in a way, laying out a future for the person being blessed...or cursed. Before he dies, Jacob speaks blessings over all his children. The blessings will prove remarkably accurate in the future of the twelve tribes of Israel.

Questions: 1. Who has spoken a word about me which shaped my future dramatically for either good or ill, such as a parent, neighbor, coach, or teacher who saddled me with a name like lazy, good for nothing, slow, wild? How did it shape my life? Who spoke blessings over me—praised me when I did well, celebrated with me at my achievements? Have I ever thanked them? 2. Who needs me to speak a blessing into their life—to give some word of hope or encouragement, especially from God?

Matthew: How often does God repeat things so we get the point? Jesus feeds thousands in the wilderness again with seven loaves and a few small fish this time. He heals the mute so they speak, the lame so they can walk, the blind so they can see. And the result is praise. The people praise the God of Israel. Except some people. Very religious folk. Leaders, even. They test him, asking him for a sign, as if healing and feeding others were not signs enough that God was working through Jesus.

Questions: 1. What does it take to get me to praise God? Does it have to be some special deliverance from trouble or some special blessings, or do I remember to praise him for food and health in the normal course of life? 2. Do I look for proof of God's working in my life through special signs, or do I believe that he does care for me and simply go about my business for him every day, trusting him to speak or act when he chooses, since he knows best what is needed?

Prayer: O God, help me keep my tongue. Teach me to measure and use my words so they build up rather than break down, help rather than harm, heal rather than hurt. Let my speech be a blessing and bring a blessing to others, especially those who don't yet know your love for them. Amen.

Day 25. Read Genesis 50.1-Exodus 2.10; Matthew 16.13-17.9;
Psalm 21.1-13; Proverbs 5.1-6.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: Joseph's opportunity for revenge upon his brothers comes with their father's death. As the most powerful man in Egypt, saving Pharaoh alone, Joseph has life or death power over them. The brothers manufacture a story that, on his deathbed, Jacob bid Joseph forgive them. Joseph does, but not because of their latest ploy. "Don't be afraid," he says. "Am I in the place of God? You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good, to keep many people alive." **Questions:** 1. How often do I put myself "in the place of God" and jump to judge, or even condemn, others? Why? 2. When has someone intended to hurt me, but God turned it to good instead? 3. When have I intended to hurt someone? What can be done to turn it to good?

Matthew: "Who do you say that I am?" Jesus asks Peter and the other disciples. This is the most important question anyone will ever be asked. The answer is the most important answer anyone will ever give, because our whole future rests on our response. Peter proclaims Jesus to be God's Son. He passes the test. Well, almost. In the next breath almost, Peter rebukes Jesus when Jesus foretells his sufferings and death. Peter still doesn't understand: God's Son is a servant...and a sacrifice...so people might be reconciled through faith in him and live with God forever. **Questions:** 1. Who do I say Jesus is? By my words? By my actions? 2. Why do I shy away from taking risk or suffering for Jesus? 3. Do I thank Jesus for the good in my life, but grumble about the difficult and dangerous?

Prayer: Lord, you accept me as I am. Help me to accept you as you are...as you truly are. For you are God's Son, my Sovereign Lord of my whole life and being. All I am and have comes from you. All I am and have, ever will be or have, belongs to you. All I am and have, I give to you. Amen.

Day 26. Read Exodus 2.11-3.22; Matthew 17.10-27;
Psalm 22.1-18; Proverbs 5.7-12.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: A new Pharaoh tyrannizes the people of Israel, so God lifts up a surprising deliverer, in a most surprising way. Moses is raised in Pharaoh's home by Pharaoh's daughter. One day he takes matters in his own hands, murdering an Egyptian mistreating an Israelite slave. With a death sentence on his head, Moses himself must flee for his life. The one who one day will deliver Israel from slavery and shepherd them to the promised land, first must be prepared and softened himself. Moses learns obedience by losing his royal privilege and becoming a servant...a shepherd. **Questions:** 1. What gifts has God given me? Do I use them according to my own will, and in the way I choose? Or according to his bidding, at the time he chooses and in the way he chooses and for whom he chooses? 2. How is God preparing to use me by giving me difficulty or humble situations right now? How am I receiving those?

Matthew: Though they had been given power to heal when sent out by Jesus, the disciples cannot heal a young man with seizures caused by a demon. After Jesus heals the boy, the disciples ask, "Why couldn't we drive it out?" "Because you have little faith," Jesus responds, not mincing words. If we trust, truly and totally, "Nothing will be impossible for you," Jesus promises. **Questions:** 1. Do I believe that with God, all things are possible? 2. How will my life reflect that belief? In my home and family? In my neighborhood? Where I work? In my church?

Prayer: God, prepare me for you for service in whatever way you choose, for you know best both what service is needed and how to prepare me for it. Forgive my playing judge over you and balking at the difficult things that come my way, as if they are wasted or hurtful. These are the very things that best prepare me to be used by you. And, Lord, forgive me for doubting that with you all things are truly possible...even your using me to work wonders in the lives of others around me. Amen.

Day 27. Read Exodus 4.1-5.21; Matthew 18.1-22;
Psalm 22.19-31; Proverbs 5.15-21.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Exodus: Chosen by God for a mission, Moses takes stock of himself. The inventory is short, so he comes up with a long list of reasons to support his "bottom line:" "O Lord, please send someone else to do it!" Our powers are limited, but God's are not. We need to look, not to ourselves and our abilities, but to God, for he provides all we have and all we lack. In fact, God even predicts that Moses will fail--initially--in his task to convince Pharaoh to release the enslaved Israelites. Matters get worse for the Israelites when Moses begins telling Pharaoh to let God's people go. The people Moses is sent to deliver turn on him with angry criticism. **Questions:** 1. Why has God created me for this time

and place? What is my mission for God? To whom is God sending me? 2. What gifts and abilities has God given me for his work here and now? What has he not given me that I need to trust that he will provide? 3. Why does God not make each of his people all-sufficient for the tasks he gives them? Why doesn't God give his people immediate success in all they do?

Matthew: Who is greatest in the kingdom of God? Jesus lifts up a little child, telling his disciples, "Whoever humbles himself like this child is greatest in the kingdom!" Does your eye or hand cause you trouble so you sin and are in danger of losing the kingdom? Pluck it out or cut it off, Jesus says, rather than lose the kingdom! Is one in danger of being lost? Jesus tells a parable of a shepherd who loses one sheep, leaves the 99 others, and seeks the lost one till he finds it. If a brother or sister wrongs you, go to them privately and talk with them to win them back. If they refuse, try again, taking another person mature in faith with you, to reconcile them. If that doesn't work, don't give up. Involve the leaders of the church! Must we forgive someone who wrongs us as many as seven times, Peter asks, trying to be generous? Jesus responds seventy-seven times, meaning as many times as it takes! Do everything possible, Jesus is saying, to reconcile everyone you can to God. Be reconciled yourself, and reconcile everyone you can. **Questions:** 1. Am I more "adult" or "child-like" in my humility? 2. How much do I share Christ's burning desire that every person be reconciled to God? 3. Who in my faith family, the church, am I at odds with? What can I do to take the initiative as Jesus directed?

Prayer: God, the list of what I lack seems so much longer than the one of my gifts and abilities. The work of reconciliation seems limitless and endless. Everyday I wrong even those I know best and care for most, and they wrong me, again and again. Forgive my ingratitude that judges your gifts to me as so meager and my lack of faith that judges the need around me as impossible to meet. Give me the child-like trust of Jesus Christ, your Son, who fed thousands who hungered with a few loaves and fishes. Give me the burning love of Christ for the lost, who without him, would be lost myself. Make me an instrument of reconciliation to everyone you have put me in relationship with, for Jesus' sake. Amen.

Day 28. Read Exodus 5.22-7.24; Matthew 18.23-19.12;
Psalm 23.1-6; Proverbs 5.22-23

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Exodus: Moses' first attempts to convince Pharaoh fail miserably. The plight of the Israelites as slaves actually worsens. Moses voices his complaints and questions to God, and God responds by telling Moses to repeat God's promises to deliver them. The people don't listen to him, because of their suffering. One complaint Moses voices is his

feeling of inadequacy to the task God has given him, citing his problems with speech. How is he to talk to the King of Egypt, or his fellow countrymen? God listens, and appoints a partner in the work: his brother, Aaron. We are stronger together in a community of faith than we are alone. **Questions:** 1. When difficult situations arise, do you wait patiently, trusting God to act, or try to engineer your own deliverance? When have you been forced to wait for God to act to change a difficult situation in your life, realizing there was nothing you could do by yourself? 2. In what area(s) of my life does God seem to be asking me to take action in which I feel inadequate, incapable, or inexperienced? Who could God be intending me to partner with in the work he gives us? 3. What complaints or questions are most pressing on me right now? Do I voice them to God, truly believing he wants me to speak to him openly and honestly, or do I avoid talking with God about them, even though they drain my energy and joy in life?

Matthew: The one who knows God's forgiving love must forgive others, as Jesus' parable to the forgiving master and the two servants reveals. When we come to know the cost God paid in the cross of his Son so we might be forgiven, the love of God for us begins to dawn upon us and form within us the new, Christ-like nature of a child of God. We realize we have been and continue to be forgiven more wrongs we commit ourselves than any other person could ever do against us. Like Christ on the cross we learn to pray: "Father, forgive them, they know not what they do." This is how Christ could suffer the relentless testing of the religious leaders of his day. Trying to trap him about divorce, he reaffirms the holiness of God's plan that a man and a woman unite in love for a lifetime together, allowing for divorce only in the case of violating that oneness through adultery. **Questions:** 1. If Christ had to die for my sin on the cross, how bad is my sin? If Christ died for me willingly, so I might be forgiven and live with God forever, how much do I matter to God? 2. Who is the person causing most conflict in my life at this point in my life? Whom do I have most trouble forgiving?

Prayer: Father, so often I feel overwhelmed—incapable and incompetent. How could you choose me to be part of your plan to redeem the world in Christ? Who am I? I am so small and insignificant. Yet you have chosen me. You have created me in your likeness and given me gifts to care for your creation and use in your master plan of redemption. And you have given me partners in your great work so that together we may accomplish all your purpose. Father, I confess that all too often I find it hard to work with the people you have chosen to be partners together in your work. All too often I wrong others, and they wrong me. All too often I find it impossible to forgive. Truly, to forgive is divine. Father, give me the heart and mind of Christ. Give me your forgiving Spirit. And when I cannot, you forgive those who have wronged me without waiting for me to forgive. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 4

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Exodus 4.10-17

Psalm: 18.25-30

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Matthew 17.14-21.

Theme: With God, All Things Are Possible ("Leaping Over Every Wall")