

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 5

Day 29. Read Exodus 7.25-9.35; Matthew 19.13-30;

Psalm 24.1-10; Proverbs 6.1-5

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: God gradually increases the severity of the plagues on Egypt, hoping to convince the Pharaoh to free God's people from slavery. **Questions:** 1. In what area(s) of my life and in what way is God "ratcheting up" pressure on me to change, so he can free me to fuller life with and for him? 2. Why do I resist his call to change, even when it means freedom and fuller life for me? 3. Is there someone who I am not releasing for fuller life, someone who I am not encouraging and empowering to achieve their utmost in life for God? What is the next step I need to take to free them?

Matthew: Jesus is rarely angry, but he becomes livid when his adult disciples rebuke people for bringing children to him to bless and pray for them. The kingdom of God is for everyone! True life and blessing is found in a loving, faithful relationship with Jesus. But while it is available to all, it is not cheap. There is a cost—a severe one, in the eyes of the world. A rich young man asks, "what must I do to inherit eternal life?" and Jesus bids him "give up everything else to follow me." The man leaves Jesus, saddened because he is unwilling to pay the price. **Questions:** 1. Who do I exclude from coming to Jesus, intentionally or unintentionally? Are there individuals or groups of people my church excludes, however unintentionally? What can I do to help them come to Jesus and receive the blessing he gives? 2. What competes in my life with following Jesus more closely? What drains my time away? My energy? My money and other resources? 3. What is the next step for me to be freer to follow Jesus?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you graciously call me to follow you. Your deepest desire is that I live with you and experience your love for me forever. You invite me to receive the greatest good, the biggest blessing, available anywhere: yourself! Forgive my hedging and holding out. Forgive my failure to fling everything else aside, and live only *for* you, live only *toward* you. Even more, forgive me for failing, by the fitful and faltering way I follow you, to excite others to the fullness of life and freedom that can only be found through you. Open my eyes to see how

I hold others back. Open my hands to take action, to help free them. Free me to follow you more fully. And free me to free others to the fullness of life you alone can give. Amen.

Day 30. Read Exodus 10.1–12.13; Matthew 20.1-28; Psalm 25.1-15; Proverbs 6.6-11

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: The plagues steadily escalate and worsen each time Pharaoh refuses to let God's people be free. God "hardened" Pharaoh and his officials' hearts so that God could perform these miraculous signs ... "that you may know I am the Lord." God wants everyone to know him, even the proudest and most self-sufficient. Locusts are sent to devour any crops not killed by the hail. Three days of darkness, so thick it could be felt, came next over the whole land of Egypt, except where God's people lived. Pharaoh relents, for the first time giving permission to the Israelite women and children to go into the wilderness, but refusing to allow their herds and flocks. Moses insists they, too, must go. In blazing anger, Pharaoh orders Moses out of his sight, threatening "The day you see my face you will die!" Moses announces the last plague: the death of the firstborn sons of all the people and even of the animals. Now, in a special symbol and meal, God foreshadows the death of his Son to redeem the world from death. The people of Israel are to kill a lamb without blemish and put its blood on the doorposts of their homes, so the Angel of Death will pass over them. They are to cook the lamb and eat it, along with flatbread made in haste, and bitter herbs to remind them of their slavery and of God's deliverance. The Passover is to be celebrated for all time to remember. **Questions:** 1. Why does God give the Egyptians one opportunity after another to relent, humble themselves before God, and set God's people free? When the final plague comes, what does it mean that only the firstborn sons are taken? Why doesn't God take all the male children, or even all the Egyptians? 2. How many chances has God given me to humble myself and follow his will and ways? 3. Taking God as my example for action, how should I treat others who wrong me?

Matthew: Jesus turns our natural human understanding of God upside down and inside out. He tells a story about a vineyard owner who hires people to work in his vineyard early in the morning, at noonday, in the middle of the afternoon, and even near the end of the day. When the time comes to pay them, all are paid exactly the same wage, though some of the workers grumble at the owner's generosity. Jesus for the first time reveals the heart of his mission: going to Jerusalem to die on the cross,

like the spotless Passover lamb, so people precious to God may be redeemed from death to full and free life with God forever. The disciples wrangle among themselves about who will be the greatest beside Jesus, thinking he will become a worldly ruler in Jerusalem. Greatest in the kingdom of God is the servant. Jesus himself came to serve, not be served. **Questions:** 1. In the parable of the vineyard, how eager is the owner that he get the crop in? What shows his great eagerness? What does that say about God? 2. The vineyard owner gives the same reward to all who worked, regardless of the length or conditions of their labors. What does that say about God? How am I at showing the same kind of love toward people around me? How does God's action in giving forgiveness freely and fully to anyone, however good or bad, compare with the ways I treat people? 3. How much do I prefer to be served rather than to serve? Whom is God calling me to serve this week to show them his love and care?

Prayer: Father, all too often my heart is hardened. I like to be served. I look to be served. Everything revolves around me and meeting my needs. Yet, you take another way, the way of service. You are the Servant of all. Holy Spirit, form the nature of Christ within me more and more. Turn my mind upside down. Bring me down to earth. Open my eyes to see, my ears to hear, my hands to hold, that I might serve as you do. Turn me inside out. Give me Christ's heart for others. Take me out of myself, and let me live for others, even as did your Son, the spotless Lamb of God, sacrificed for me and for the world. Amen.

Day 31. Read Exodus 12.14-13.16; Matthew 20.29-21.22;
Psalm 25.16-22; Proverbs 6.12-15

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Genesis: The people of Israel are to pass on the custom of the Passover, so future generations will remember that "The Lord brought us out of the land of slavery with a mighty hand." During the festival of Unleavened Bread (or Passover), yeast is forbidden anywhere in the house. Only unleavened bread is eaten, a reminder of the "bread of haste" God's people ate on the night God delivered them from slavery in Egypt. To empty the whole house of yeast is a ritual reminder that God-followers are never to compromise their total allegiance to the One who delivers people from whatever holds them in bondage. At the first Passover, God instructs the people to place the blood of a sacrificial lamb on the top and sides of the door of their homes, and stay sheltered safely inside, so the destroying angel passes over them. All who believe are covered and preserved because of the blood of the Lamb, Jesus Christ, the spotless Son of God and Son of Man, sacrificed on the cross. God also instructs the Israelites to ask their Egyptian slave-owners to give them silver, gold and clothing before they leave Egypt. The former slaves plunder their captors, who end up

compensating their victims for centuries of servitude inflicted on God's people. Likewise, all the faithful one day will be rewarded for their servitude and suffering in this world when they are finally free to live with God forever. **Questions:** 1. What binds me and keeps me from enjoying the fullness of life available from God now? What must happen to change that? What is God's part in the change, and what is mine? 2. Who is God asking me to pass on the priceless legacy of freedom, life and faith in God? What can I do to pass it on to them? 3. How can I cover myself with the blood of the spotless Lamb of God who was sacrificed for me? How can I show my love and devotion to him?

Matthew: 'What do you want me to do for you?' Jesus asks two blind men. Surprised? Doesn't Jesus know what we truly need? Why does he ask then? God never forces us to take what he wants for us—to ask that his will be done, and not ours— even though what he wants for us is always best for us. With God, you get what you want—for good or ill, depending on what you really want. Do we want him? The two men ask for sight and he heals them...and they use their sight to follow Jesus, not go their own way. Jesus rides into Jerusalem like a king to the accolade of the people; but he rides a donkey, not a warhorse. He is not the kind of king they think he is. He turns out the money lenders from the temple— people with power and privilege— while he welcomes the blind and lame, and heals them. A fruitless fig tree withers at his scathing rebuke. The power of God is at work through him, to cast down the mighty and raise up the lowly. **Questions:** 1. How would I answer Jesus if he asked me the same question he asked the blind men? What do I want Jesus to do for me? Do I want what he wants, or want him to do something for me? Do I want him most of all, or what he can do for me? 2. How has my own vision changed since I came to know Jesus? Do I look at situations and people differently because I have seen and follow Jesus? How? 3. What blindness(es) does Jesus still need to heal me of now?

Prayer: God, even my best vision is far from your perfect 20-20. So often my vision fails me completely, and I find myself groping in the darkness, blind. All too often I follow others, a blind person following the blind. I can't see what is wholesome and healthy to follow; I can't -or won't-see the way I should go, the way you are going. I compromise your way of life to satisfy others, or my own longings. God, heal my sight. Give me the vision of Christ. And when I am blindly following my own will and way, lay your hand upon me, and lead me back to where I can see your true light again. Give me Christ's compassion for all others, since we are all blind without Christ, just as I am. Amen.

Day 32. Read Exodus 13.17-15.18; Matthew 21.23-46;
Psalm 26.1-12; Proverbs 6.16-19

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Exodus: To lead his people out of slavery and to the freedom of the Promised Land, God does not choose the most direct course. He knows that, being weakened by their slavery, they would be unable to fight the war that will surely come. They are unready to receive the full blessing that he wants to give them. Facing intense struggle right away, they might give in and return to slavery. He chooses a better path, though a harder one in many respects: the wilderness. In fact, Pharaoh relents, releasing his slaves and pursues them. Hopelessly outnumbered and out-armed, the Israelites indeed complain it would have been better to be slaves than to die in the desert. 'Do not be afraid,' Moses says, 'Stand firm and watch the deliverance God will bring for you.' Their task is to trust God, and keep moving...out onto the very floor of the sea as God parts the waters. At the end of the day, the most powerful army of the world lies defeated—totally destroyed—at the bottom of the sea. **Questions:** 1. When and where in my life has God parted the waters for me? What onslaughts of the enemy has God delivered me from? 2. When have I hankered to go back to slavery rather than take the risk that following God and his Son, Jesus, entails? 3. What powerful forces are arrayed against me even now, trying to take me back to slavery?

Matthew: What authority does Jesus have to do what he does? The religious authorities cross examine him to find out. Jesus turns the tables on all such questioning. By what authority do we do what we do—or omit doing what we should? He tells a story about a landowner who plants a vineyard, loans it out to tenants, and then seeks to get the rent due him for his property. The tenants mistreat, even kill, his servants sent to get the payment the owner deserves. Finally he sends his son, hoping against hope that they will honor him. They kill him and take the vineyard for their own. What will the owner do? Destroy those tenants, and give the vineyard to others who will produce its fruit as due. **Questions:** 1. What part of his vineyard has God entrusted to me? How am I to bear fruit for him in my relationships, work, community, world? 2. In what ways do I try to take control of my life and situations from God, rather than seeing everything as an opportunity to be doing his work and bearing fruit for him? 3. How do I return him thanks and show that it all comes from him and belongs to him?

Prayer: God, you lead me in ways I cannot understand and often don't like. Why do you lead me into the wilderness, where I cannot see my path? Why do you lead me into the desert, where its dry and dusty? I would rather take control and go my own way. I would rather think it all is up to me, from me, and for me. Take it from me, for I do not deserve my very being. Take me out of the center. Entrust it all to the person who will give you the glory. Give it to the new person you are transforming me to be through the Spirit of Christ, to the one who in your eyes I already am in Christ. It's yours. All yours! Amen.

Day 33. Read Exodus 15.19-17.7; Matthew 22.1-33; Psalm 27.1-6; Proverbs 6.20-26

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Exodus: True freedom is difficult to bear. Freedom is the harder path, like an uphill climb through the desert. Enslavement seems easier, safer, or so it seems in the short run, especially when life presses hard upon us. The former slaves, now free, are barely three days into the wilderness and already they want to return to slavery in Egypt. They are thirsty. Imagine that! Thirst in the desert? God provides water. A few days later and a little deeper on their journey into the desert, they complain again. They are hungry for meat. They clamor to return to slavery in Egypt, where at least they could survive. God literally rains food upon them: manna. Every morning when they awake, during all their wandering in the wilderness, until the very day they at last enter the promised land, God gives his people food from heaven to sustain them on their journey. One day at a time. Just enough for the day's need. Every day. Still the complaining doesn't stop. So the old nature in us struggles every day to take control, to take us back to slavery, while the new nature, free in Christ, lives from the grace God sends new every day. **Questions:** 1. In what different ways does God give me what I truly need spiritually to sustain me in the long journey? 2. Over what in my life am I grumbling about God's not providing what I think I need?

Matthew The crowds were astonished at Jesus' teaching. He tells a parable about a king giving a wedding feast for his son. The invited guests—those who normally would have access to the king because of their status—refused to come. Wanting the festival hall to be filled for the celebration, the king orders his servants to go into the streets and invite everyone they find, both bad and good, to be sorted out at the great banquet. 'Many are invited, but few are chosen' Jesus says. Jesus is God's invitation. God's invitation to new life is for everyone, but not everyone will accept it. The very religious leaders who should have been, of all people, most eager and likely to receive Jesus—because of their advantage in scriptural knowledge, their prayer and worship, their positions of authority in the religious organization—are the very ones who seek to trap Jesus and destroy him. They think they have it all together already, and fail to recognize who is present. Yet they are trapped by their own schemes. **Questions:** 1. Am I astonished that I am one of those invited to the great banquet? Or do I take it for granted, and go on with my own business, rather than living in wonder and preparing to be with the king? 2. In what ways am I tempted to get in a religious rut or routine, and forget to sit in wonder at Jesus' feet, amazed at his personal teaching to me? 3. What helps restore the wonder? 4. Who do I know who hasn't yet heard God's invitation to the great banquet? How can I extend their invitation from God?

Prayer: God, day after day you shower your commonplace miracles upon me, giving all I need to sustain my life, day by day. Day after day I forget that and instead think of what I lack, or imagine I need. Forgive my presumption. But most of all, forgive my forgetting that you have invited me to the great banquet. Let me live every day in the wonder of that feast to come. Let me re-read every day my invitation, extended in the gracious teaching, and the life and death and resurrection of your Son. Amen.

Day 34. Read Exodus 17.8-19.15; Matthew 22.34-23.12;

Psalm 27.7-14; Proverbs 6.27-35

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Exodus: Enemies arise immediately to attack God's people on their journey with God. Moses is stationed high atop a mountain, surveying the warfare. As long as he holds the staff God gave him, by which God wrought miracles before Pharaoh in Egypt, God's people win. But when he tires and lowers his arms, the enemy wins. Finally two helpers support him by holding his arms up. God's people are victorious. No believer can be victorious over our enemies in this world by ourselves. We need to stand under that cross of Christ, and we need our brothers and sisters in faith to sustain us. God's plan is to put us in a community on the long journey of life. When Moses' father-in-law visits, he discovers Moses wearing himself out trying to meet all the needs of the people. The people are also unsatisfied as just one person tries to help them. He advises Moses to select mature, capable, honest people who fear God to help in the task of leading the people. Leaders are appointed over thousands, hundreds, fifties and tens, so that everyone gets the personal attention and care God desires. The people, who number in the hundreds of thousands, care for one another in small groups of ten. God chooses these people, of all the people in the world, to be a kingdom of priests and a holy nation for him. You, like every single person in God's kingdom, are a priest, chosen and appointed by God, with a personal ministry to accomplish for God and the good of God's people! **Questions:** 1. When have I attempted to struggle through some life or faith issue on my own, or fought some temptation, without seeking the guidance and strength of other faithful people? What was the result? 2. Why do I hesitate to get together with others to share what's going on in my life and faith journey? 3. Who are in my "small group" -the circle of 10 or so believers God has put me in relationship, that might become a small group to do life together? 4. What is my personal ministry for God in my family, in the church, in his mission to transform people in our community and world?

Matthew: What is our ultimate purpose in life? Why are we here? One skeptical expert in the scriptures wants answers from Jesus, when he asks 'What is the most

important commandment? ‘Love God with all your being!’ Jesus responds. We are created to love. All your heart, mind, strength, and soul is intended to love God. And from our love of God will flow everything else we are to do—love toward all the people around us. We are here to love God and love our neighbors as ourselves, which means valuing everyone else ahead of ourselves, treating them as we would naturally treat ourselves. How can we not love this God, who sends his Son in humble form as our servant, Jesus Christ. People who love and follow God will do things differently than the way the world acts. The greatest among believers will be the one who stoops lowest to serve. This is the way God chose in Jesus Christ, the way of service. To love someone leads us to become like the one we love. **Questions:**

1. How can I use my mind to love God more? My strength (physical body and being)? My heart (emotions and will)? My soul (spirit)?
2. Who is God calling me to serve for him today? What specifically can I do to show them God’s love, and mine?
3. What in me resists stooping to serve others as Christ served? How can I receive God’s help and enlist the help of others in growing a more Christ-like heart and mind?

Prayer: God, so often I struggle on alone, seeking to do with my own strength and powers, what I cannot do. Not only that, but I leave others to fend for themselves. You never intended it that way. You made us for relationship with you and one another. You made us to love, not just in our thoughts or emotions, but in our words and actions. You made us with minds, hearts, bodies, souls, so that we would love one another as you love us. Help me have the heart and mind of Christ, your servant Son, my Savior and Sovereign. Form in me the character of Jesus. Let me love you with all my being, and knowing your love, let me stoop to serve with the same serving love with which Jesus loves me. Give me the eyes of Jesus to see those you set before me to serve, and strengthen my hands to show them your love in action. Amen.

Day 35. Read Exodus 19.16-21.21; Matthew 23.1-13-39;
Psalm 28.1-9; Proverbs 7.1-5

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Exodus: How can the holy God come into this fallen world? How can any unholy person stand in God’s presence? The holy can have nothing to do with the unholy. The holy is to the unholy as fire is to gasoline. It will be totally destroyed. Yet God hungers to reestablish relationship with people. He created people in his image and likeness so they would have life in fullness through a right, loving relationship with him and one another. As God descends, Mount Sinai is washed with fire, wreathed in smoke, trembling like a leaf. Even the priests are warned to stay away or they will be consumed. Yet God speaks to one man, Moses. Through this one man God

declares to them his amazing word of grace. He has acted himself to re-establish the relationship that was sundered: "I am your God, who brought you out of slavery!" God is already foreshadowing in the Old Testament how he will ultimately restore relationship with anyone who wishes it: through one man, Jesus, who by sacrificing himself on the cross removes our sinfulness and restores the holiness for all who believe. God establishes the covenant of the law on Sinai, showing how people who have been redeemed are to live. The first commandments deal with our relationship with God. It is to be maintained above all. The rest—the majority—deal with our relationships with other people. Right relationship with God means right relationship with people. The two are inseparable in God's eyes. The law holds up the mirror to us, the mirror of the true life of the child of God. This is the way the child of God, in the image of God, will act. The commandments cover every aspect of life, because the whole person is accountable to God. And the whole person is redeemed through the action of God and through faith. Even slaves are to be cared for and treated justly, because God is their God. When I mistreat others, I go against my true nature in Christ. Yet God's mercy still attends me. **Questions:** 1. Though I truly believe that God wants a loving, intimate relationship with me, despite all my failures and faults, why do I still do things that go against God? What does this say about my own abilities to change myself? What does this say about God's mercy who still loves and accepts me for Christ? 2. If God treats me with such mercy, how should I treat others? Who am I having trouble treating with kindness right now? How can I show them mercy? 3. Using the ten commandments as a mirror or measuring stick, where do I need to grow next? In my relationship with God? With other people?

Matthew: Pretenders! Imposters! Jesus has harsh words for those who just go about the motions, to appear righteous. And the religious leaders are the worst! Teachers of the law! Jesus calls them blind guides. They fulfill the letter of the law, but don't follow the spirit. They use the law to limit what they have to do, rather than accepting the Spirit behind the law which shows them how to act lovingly and godly in every situation. The transformation can't come from the outside in, it must come from the inside out. "First wash the inside of the cup, then the outside will be clean, too!" I can't act my way into it, any more than I can raise myself to life again once I have died. God alone can take my old nature and make it new. God will. 'How often have I longed to gather you together, as a hen gathers her chicks safely under her wings' Jesus says of Jerusalem, the very people who would soon turn on him and call for his death. God loves sinners literally to death—his own Son's death on a cross. **Questions:** 1. In what ways do I put on a show or pretend in my walk with God and service for God? 2. Why do I feel a need to put on a mask and seem different than I really am? 3. To whom am I most likely to pretend? Why? 4. How does the incontrovertible fact that God loves me just as I am free me to change, to be transparent and genuine with others, letting them see the real me?

Prayer: O Lord, like my brother in faith, Paul, I don't understand my own actions. I do the very things I hate again and again, and don't do what I truly want. I truly want to please you. I truly want to be like you and act like you. Yet, you love me and extend mercy to me. Let me begin there. Let me put aside my pride and accept your mercy, and let me be merciful. I will never completely fulfill your will or perfectly follow your way in this world. Pick me up and empower me to try again when I fall. And let me be merciful to others who fall and fail me. That, more than anything, means your new nature is at work within me. And that is what gives you joy! Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 5

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Exodus 19.16–20.3

Psalm 27.1-8

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Matthew 22.34-40

Theme: Loving Like God Fulfills The Law