

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

## Daily Devotional Companion

### Week 16

**Day 106.** Read Joshua 13.1-14.15; Luke 18.1-17;  
Psalm 85.1-13; and Proverbs 13.7-8.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Joshua:** The work isn't finished. You've come to the end. The end of your strength. The end of your life. And there is still much work to be done. There are still large areas to be conquered. Joshua is told his end is near. Time to take care of business. Put things in order for the future generations to follow. 'Assign their inheritance,' God tells him. By lot. Show no favoritism. One as old as himself—Caleb, the only other faithful one of the twelve spies who with Joshua brought back a good report of the promised land and urged Israel that with God fighting for them, they should go straight up and seize the land—comes with a special request. Caleb, from the tribe of Judah, asks for the hill country. Because he followed God wholeheartedly, this land was promised him. Old as he is, he still has unbelievable strength of spirit: 'I am still as strong today as the very day when Moses sent me out to explore the promised land; I am just as ready to go out to battle now as then.' To Caleb and his descendants will go Hebron, where one day a King will arise and rule, a king who is a man wholly after God's own heart, a man like Caleb. **Questions:** 1. What areas of my life are not yet given to God and totally under his Lordship? 2. Who are my spiritual heirs? What spiritual inheritance am I leaving to those who come after me? 3. How do God's promises strengthen my heart, the way the promises to Caleb gave him courage and vigor, even to old age? Am I trusting and following God wholeheartedly, half-heartedly, or dis-heartened?

**Luke:** Never, never, never give up, Jesus says. Pray always. Be like a woman who knows what she wants and will stop at nothing—who quite literally will never stop—until she gets what she wants. She seeks out the Judge who alone can give her what she desires...and pesters him persistently. When he is walking in the street...when he opens his front door...whenever he turns around...she is there! Pleading. Pestering. Wearing him out with her constant coming. So he gives her what she desires. Will not God even more give justice to his chosen ones? Will they not have their hearts' true desire? Will the Son of Man find that kind of faith...persistent in even the face of refusal or discouraging delay...when he returns to earth? He will come again... as Judge. But what will he judge by? By what his eyes see? No...and yes. No, he will not judge by appearances, not by what

human eyes can see. Humans' eyes see and either trust wrongly in their own actions or despair. One man boasts he fasts twice a week and tithes off the top from everything he gets. He is not like those others who are obviously so far from God, as 'anyone can see'. The Son of Man will judge what no one else can see: the heart. He will look at the one who has lived so far from God, but who simply falls on God's mercy, pleading for forgiveness, and give her the desire of her heart. He will welcome her home, justified. Trust in your own righteousness...or be put right with God through the Son of Man...the choice is for each person to make. What will the Son of Man find when he comes?

**Questions:** 1. How persistent in my prayer conversation with God am I? Do I really lay out before God the deepest desires of my heart? Do I really know what I truly desire, beneath and beyond all the 'little things' that I clamor for every day? 2. Are there things about my spiritual life and relationship with God that are a source of self-satisfaction and pride, which become a barrier to further progress in my relationship with God? My relationship with other people?

**Prayer:** O God, keep me burning and yearning to seek you more and more, even to my last breath. Let me never give up longing for you...loving you. Strip away all the encumbrances, break down all the barriers between us. Especially the ones I erect myself. My own pride in the halting steps I have taken. Even they are your doing...gifts from you. Let me leave a living legacy of a haunting hunger for you to those who come after me. May they not see someone who is sated and complete...but someone hungry and seeking...endlessly seeking...relentlessly seeking...my true home and You, the One who loves and longs for me even more than I could ever long for You.. Amen.

**Day 107.** Read Joshua 15.1-63; Luke 18.18-43;  
Psalm 86.1-17; and Proverbs 13.9-10.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Joshua:** The promised land. It is a real place. It has boundaries. It borders seas and deserts. There are mountains and valleys. And all of God's chosen people have part in it. There is a place for every daughter and son of God. A place appointed. A particular place. A real place. It is an inheritance. A gift bestowed by One who was before us. But in the meantime, we cannot root out the old occupiers. We cannot dislodge the old nature within us. To this day, and until we die and receive our full inheritance, the place prepared for us, the old nature will be with us, as a reminder, a test and a training tool. A reminder of the fullness that is yet to be; a test of our resolve to live as people anticipating an inheritance; and a training tool to practice the patient loving character of the One whose character and nature is the very inheritance we seek. **Questions:** 1. Do I truly understand and believe that everything around me now is passing and that the truly real and lasting is ahead of me? How does that change the way I use my possessions and the things of this world? 2. Do I live the patient, persistent love of God toward my sinful self?

Toward other people? 3. Do I thank God for both the spiritual peaks and the difficult valleys of my life? Which helps me grow more like God? Why?

**Luke:** Why do I call you good, Jesus? People call me good—blessed beyond belief in fact, because of my prestige and possession. I come asking...seeking...the way to Life. I don't know how to describe it. It is above...beyond...anything I have experienced here...anything I know. Yet, I know this indescribable, elusive thing is what I seek...what I lack. But I know where it may be found. That is why I ask you, Jesus. You, Jesus are the Way...the Truth....the Life I seek. And so I call you good. You look at me and love me. And so you are truly good to me. So good that You challenge me. Call me to account. You won't allow me to settle for anything less. 'Sell all. Give it all away, to the poor. Come, follow me. You will have treasure...what you truly seek... where eternity, not time, is your dwelling place: God.' I pull up short. I flinch...and falter...and go away sad. Something inside me resists. Something that won't die. There are 'riches' the I in me won't relinquish though they are pennies compared to the wealth you give. Yet, nothing is impossible for you. Even now you look at me with love...and long for me to choose you as my treasure. You are on your way to Jerusalem so that, by being crucified, you may become the Way for me and all who have wandered far and settled for less. It so obvious a blind man can see it, even though I cannot. You ask him, 'What do you want me to do for you?' He who already sees...who already calls you Son of David and Lord, says simply, 'I want to see.' And when he sees doubly, with both his physical and spiritual eyes, he follows you in the way of the cross. You ask me the same question. My answer is the same. Let me see. Let me see clearly. Let me follow the Way of the one who was crucified that I may live.

**Questions:** 1. Have I been following outwardly God's way, without ever really "selling out" totally, committing myself completely, everything that I have and am, to follow Jesus Christ? 2. How has reading God's Word and coming to know Jesus 'opened my eyes' and shown me a different way to be and act? 3. What does the way of the cross mean for me personally, in the life and relationships I have been given?

**Prayer:** You are so good to me, God! Don't ever stop challenging me. Don't ever let me settle for less than eternity over time, than the cross over worldly success, than the nature of Christ over my sinful self. It is always there, like an anchor, holding me back, weighing me down. Young elephants are restrained with unbreakable cords about their legs pegged to the ground, so that when they are fully grown and at the peak of their power, a flimsy rope will keep them from breaking free. Cut the cord, Lord. Snap it in two. Let your cross, O Christ, set me free to be myself and live only for you. Day by day, let me follow you in the way of the cross, for that alone is my true treasure. Amen.

**Day 108.** Read Joshua 16.1-18.28; Luke 19.1-27;  
Psalm 87.1-7; and Proverbs 13.11.

**Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:**

**Joshua:** How can Manasseh and Ephraim be among God's people? Their mother was Egyptian! They are 'half-breeds' at best. Their mother had worshipped other gods...who were no gods. Her people, Egypt, had ultimately enslaved the people of Israel. But now they are to inherit with those full-blooded descendants of Abraham. How? Because they were adopted by Jacob, and adoption means the full rights of the natural born are theirs, too. One of Manasseh's sons only had daughters. They went to Joshua and demanded the right of inheritance, reminding him of the command of God through Moses to give them an inheritance, too. The descendants of Manasseh are not able to drive out the native born Canaanites from their land, either; but as they grow stronger, they manage to control them, making them work at hard labor. The descendants of Manasseh are so numerous, they clamor for more land. Joshua bids them 'go up into the forest and clear land for yourselves.' The Promised Land is totally the gift of God, won through his power displayed for us. But we are responsible, too, for realizing it in our lives. We are to control the contrary forces within us. We are to push back the boundaries. We are to accept and realize the inheritance that is God's gift to us. **Questions:** 1. How am I like Manasseh and Ephraim, not someone deserving in my own right, yet someone inheriting God's blessing as his true Child, Jesus Christ? 2. What is my part in 'clearing the land'—what new ground do I need to break—to enter more into the fullness of new life that Christ has won for me and that God wants me to inherit as his adopted child? 3. What part is the "Canaanite" within me that I need to subjugate to God and put to work for God so it bears fruit for his Kingdom?

**Luke:** They had him treed. By their hatred. Because of their envy. He lived life alone. Separated. But hardly serene. His power, his privilege, his possessions all set him apart. Fine! Let him have it his way...alone. It was no wonder Zacchaeus was in the tree. His little stature...not just physically, but in the community...demanded it. All that changed in an instant. 'Come down, Zacchaeus; I must stay in your house today!' Jesus called him by name! First name! Could the Lord really know him...or really care for him, really knowing him? Zacchaeus, who sold out to the occupying army, sold out his people, all for possessions and power and privileges? Is this a sick prank, Jesus? Will you turn on me, humiliate me more, who am already an outcast? Jesus ate with him, even though the people despised him for it. A friend of such a sinner could not be friend of God. Unless. Unless this God is a friend of sinners...such a friend that their sin is no barrier. Unless this God accepts sinners as sons and daughters. See Zacchaeus, suddenly acting like a Son, instead of a sinner: half his possession he gives to the poor! He repents of the wrong he has done, promising restitution times four—more even than the Law requires! The Son has come to seek and save the lost sons and daughters! Surely the kingdom is coming. It must be coming right now, for such impossible people to make improbable changes. No, servants of this gracious God, use the capital of forgiveness God has entrusted to you. Go, forgiven, to forgive. Go, blessed of God, to be a blessing, win cities with the grace of God, five cities, ten cities, and more. Don't sit on the grace you've been given. More will be given to the one who has, and gives it away, but to the one who holds onto grace as though there weren't enough to go around, even it will be taken from them and given to another. The One who died on a tree came to seek and save the lost, so that those who are destined

to die on the cross beside him might discover a new destiny...and live. **Questions:** 1. Who are the Zacchaeuses in my life, the people of power and prestige and possessions, who I shy away from serving and witnessing to for Christ? What can I do to touch them with Christ's love in actions and words? 2. Because giving the love of Christ away means to receive more of it, how can I live every day seeking to give Christ's love away to others around me? Who is 'poor' among the people I know, to whom I can give away what God has first given me? 3. When I receive Christ in the Lord's Supper, do I go from the meal changed by his love in having meal fellowship with me? How has my life changed since Christ came to establish an intimate personal relationship with me?

**Prayer:** Me? You want to eat with me? Just as I am? I'm sorry, Lord. It's not possible. How can I possibly remain just as I am, since you are who you are? I was separated...alone...out on a limb...lost. Yet, you called me to come down to earth. To eat with you as your...friend. Very well. I will come to earth, since you call me and claim me as yours. I will be yours. All whom I wrong, I will ask forgiveness and seek to right our relationship, even as you have righted mine. Instead of getting, I will give...as you have given. Only it will not be me...not as I am...or was. It will be you. It will be your new nature rising in me, as the old nature declines and dies. Let me climb down from my lofty, lonely perch, and stoop to serve...and seek to save...even as you did. Amen.

**Day 109.** Read Joshua 19.1-20.9; Luke 19.28-48;  
Psalm 88.1-18; and Proverbs 13.1-14.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Joshua:** In God's territory there must be cities of refuge. Because every life is so precious, whenever someone spills blood, even unintentionally, that one's blood must be spilled. There is an Avenger. But in the city of refuge that God commands be provided, the spiller of blood may live and not have their own blood, their own life, forfeited. Whoever spills blood may flee there. They must stay there—within the city—until...until the death of the High Priest. Then they may go free. No more guilt remains. God is prophesying symbolically what he is preparing: deliverance from sin by the death of the High Priest who is also the sacrifice for sin. All sin means death—death for others, whose lives we diminish as we sin against them—and death for ourselves as sinners. But in the High Priest who offers himself as the sacrifice—all will be made alive who seek refuge in him.

**Questions:** 1. How has my selfishness and sin diminished the life of others, either physically or spiritually? 2. Do I flee to the one who is my refuge for forgiveness? Do I faithfully and regularly take my sins to him in confession? Do I dwell in forgiveness, and not just dabble at it? 3. When I am wronged, do I play the Avenger, or accept God's judgment of mercy on others and like Christ, pray for their forgiveness? Am I bearing a grudge against anyone I need to forgive, so they—and I—can be set free?

**Luke:** The city of peace is in an uproar! Jesus is coming. An impromptu parade materializes. It is not impromptu from God's perspective. It has been prophesied. Promised long ago. The people, bursting with joy, spontaneously fulfill God's Word proclaimed long before, by choosing and using the words God spoke through the Psalmist centuries before: "Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord!" Jesus rides humbly on a donkey, the foal of a donkey, humbly as King, to the acclaim of his subjects. He weeps over what he sees, knowing that nothing he sees can long stand. It is based on injustice and disbelief. Jesus goes straight into God's house. The cleansing must begin 'at home'...God's home. As he does so, he fulfills God's prophesy through Jeremiah, completes God's promise made centuries early: "My house will be a house of prayer." Now, through Jesus, the den of robbers will be restored to be the place where people can live in right relationship with God again. Every day he teaches in the temple. No wonder the people hang on his every word. In his words and deeds, God's Word is alive and at work, transforming the world. **Questions:** 1. As Jesus comes to me humbly now, hidden in the lowliness of scriptures, in the common water of Baptism and the everyday bread and wine of Communion, and in the brokenness of his body, the Church, do I still rejoice and celebrate and acknowledge him as my King, as the people did when he humbly entered Jerusalem on a donkey? 2. Since I am to be the temple of the Holy Spirit, and since Jesus promises to take up his residence within me with his Father, what would Jesus say to me as his temple today? What parts of my life would he cleanse? Do I pray for his cleansing? 3. Do I listen to Jesus teaching me every day? Do I hang on his words as the people did in Jerusalem, eagerly reading, hearing, and talking about him? How am I taking what I read and hear about him to heart?

**Prayer:** You are my King, Jesus. Rule over my life, my loves, my desires and dislikes. I come to you alone. You alone are my refuge, the forgiver of all my faults. To you alone I flee, to find the grace I need. I have hurt others. I hurt others still. Come, dwell in your temple. Cleanse me from top to bottom, from the highest of my spirit to the meanest part of my physical being. You are the High Priest and the sacrifice which cleanses both. Let me hang on your every word...of correction...and of compassion. May others see your coming into such a one as me, and also flee, as I have to you for refuge. You—and the people cleansed by your blood—are God's city of refuge. You—and your forgiven and forgiving people—are the city of Peace, Jerusalem. Blessed are you, the King, who comes in the name of the Lord! Come, claim your temple! Amen.

**Day 110.** Read Joshua 21.1-22.20; Luke 20.1-26;  
Psalm 89.1-13; and Proverbs 13.15-16.

**Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:**

**Joshua:** Even the priests have a place in the promised land. Their inheritance is God himself. The only land they need is cities to dwell in, with pasture for their animals. Not one inch of the promised land is theirs. God is their portion. With the priests provided for, God's promises have been fulfilled. Not one of all God's promises to the house of Israel failed. God has faithfully fulfilled every promise. Will the people be as faithful? They have been told by God the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle, is the only place to offer sacrifice. One portion of the people build an altar on the way to possess their portion of the promised land, near the Jordan river and the boundary of the Promised Land. The rest of God's people take immediate, forceful action. Remembering when they had been led to worship other gods in the wilderness wandering, and the destructive consequences that quickly followed, the whole nation amasses to wage war against them. Emissaries are sent with a warning and an offer: 'How can you break faith with the faithful God? If you rebel now, tomorrow the whole community will suffer. If your land is not fit, come and share in the land we have been given.' **Questions:** 1. Who has a deep enough relationship and cares for you so much among God's people that he or she will speak words of accountability to you? Are you thankful for such persons? Do you seek them out for counsel? 2. With whom have you built such a relationship of trust and caring that you can speak words of counsel or correction? 3. Do you share humbly and honestly with them your own experiences of failure and your shortcomings? Are you well 'armed' with the Word of God so you can be speaking to others God's will and ways, and not just speaking from your own biases or opinions?

**Luke:** How can you do what you do, Jesus? Who are you to tell me how to live? Even—and especially—the religious leaders wanted to know. No. They thought they already knew and wanted to trap Jesus. What about John the Baptizer? Was he from God or just pleasing people? Now there is a dilemma. If the religious leaders were to say John's authority was merely from men, that would displease the people. If they said he was from God, then why didn't they do what John said—repent and turn their lives around, confessing their sins? 'We don't know- we won't say-where we think his authority came from.' Tit for tat. Neither will Jesus say. But he will tell a story about the absent Owner of a vineyard who entrusts it to tenants, and who sends emissaries repeatedly to get the fruit he is due, only to have the tenants mistreat them. Finally he sends his son, a last attempt. They kill the son, throwing him outside the vineyard, claiming the vineyard as their own. Dreadful destruction awaits them, as they deserve. It is prophesied: the stone rejected will become the cornerstone. Fall on it, and you will be broken. Let it fall on you, and you will be crushed. The leaders conspire to kill Jesus after that. They try to trap him as a revolutionary, a threat to the emperor. Jesus is more revolutionary than the most rabid revolutionary when he pleads: 'Render to God the things that are God's.' **Questions:** 1. If I had been present in the Gospel stories today, would I have believed that Jesus' authority was from God, or was he merely a man with charisma? Would I have followed his radical command to 'render to God what is God's' and confess his complete Lordship over me publicly? 2. What does his command 'render to God what is God's' mean in my life today? Do I render to God the fruit he is due from what he has entrusted to me?

Prayer: God, so often I go about my work as if it is my work. I approach my life as if it is my life...to do with whatever I will. Jesus calls me to render to you what is yours. That would be me. That would be my time...my thoughts...my things...my self. This place you have put me...is yours. These people you have put in my life...are there by your purpose and plan. Lord, be Lord. You have the right to require it. Yet, you simply ask: Who is the authority? You could demand, and instead you ask me to make up my mind. I waffle. I want it differently at times, but I know it is yours...all yours. And I want it to be yours. All yours. Break my hardened heart, my selfish Self, on Christ the cornerstone, and build upon him as the foundation the new person you are making me to be. Amen.

**Day 111.** Read Joshua 22.21–23.16; Luke 20.27-47;  
Psalm 89.14-37; and Proverbs 13.17-19.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Joshua:** War is imminent between factions of the people of God. In fact, the very group in danger of being attacked invites attack...if they deserve it. They are accused of going against God's will and way when they built an altar of their own. Are they striking out alone, failing to follow what God says? He has said there is one place where the sacrifice is to be made: the Tent of Meeting, the Tabernacle, where God himself has chosen to be and consents to be found by whomever seeks him there. Why are they building an altar somewhere else than where God consents to be? They have built an altar there by the Jordan river, because it is the boundary of the Promised Land. They live outside...beyond the border. They realize that as they live outside the Promised Land, they are in danger of forgetting and of going another way than God's. For this reason alone, they built the altar. It is a replica...a reminder...of the true altar of God in his chosen sanctuary. The one they make will never know the blood of the sacrifices. In the true sanctuary alone, they will worship. Their hearts remain true. The warfare among God's people is averted, as God's people work through the conflict together, talking with and understanding one another, instead of fighting. **Questions:** 1. What are the bedrock truths of the Bible that I can never compromise or abandon? Would I be willing to stand firm in the face of opposition, even opposition from among the people who claim God as their God? 2. What helps has God given us so we can remain faithful and on course with him, as we live and serve in a world that is far from God's Promised Land? \_\_\_ The Word \_\_\_ Baptism \_\_\_ Holy Communion \_\_\_ The Community of Christ, the Church \_\_\_ The Creed \_\_\_ Prayer \_\_\_ Serving, using my Gifts \_\_\_ Telling Others about Jesus Christ \_\_\_ Other (\_\_\_\_\_)? Which am I strongest in? Which do I need more work in?

**Luke:** Is there life after this life? What is it like on the other side of the grave? What will happen to me when I die? Many people propose many answers, without really knowing.

Even religious leaders like the Sadducees, who studied the Bible. There is One who does know. 'Those who are considered worthy of being part of that age and of the resurrection of the dead..., ' Jesus says, 'will be different...and the same.' They will neither marry nor be given in marriage. They won't be married to one another any longer, for all will have only one Spouse, the One who has loved them more than any earthly spouse- or parent or friend- ever did: God. They are not able to die. They are like angels, immortal beings ever in God's presence, face to face with God. They are children of the Resurrection.' So watch out for false teachers who put on a show of knowledge...and religion...like fancy clothes to draw attention to themselves and benefit themselves. Look at their lives, what they do, and decide whether they know the truth by comparing it with God's anointed One, the Christ, whom even King David acknowledged as his Lord. **Questions:** 1. Do I treat everyone around me as the eternal being they are by God's gift—the saved, with deep respect and honor, and the lost with deep desire that they come to know Christ and live with him forever? 2. What will it be like to be a 'child of the resurrection'? How does life with Christ now give me a foretaste of that joy? Do I live with joy, courage, confidence and compassion as a 'child of the resurrection'?

**Prayer:** Lord, when we speak together in prayer, I know you are listening. Across the impassable gulf between time and eternity, you are here and you hear. As I pray, your Holy Spirit lifts me up into your very being, into the conversation between you and my Lord, Jesus Christ. Graciously you lift me into your very being, O Holy Trinity, and give me a foretaste of the fullness that is to come when, by your grace, I stand in your presence like the holy angels, an immortal being, face to face with you forever. Lord, make me a person of prayer. Make prayer—speaking with you—be my being. Let me pray without ceasing, so that all my being may be praise and thanks to you. On this side of the Resurrection, let me live as a 'child of the resurrection' now, so that others experience and seek you, the one who is the Resurrection and the life all seek. Amen.

**Day 112.** Read Joshua 24.1-33; Luke 21.1-28;  
Psalm 89.38-52; and Proverbs 13.20-23.

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

**Joshua:** Even Abraham worshipped other gods—things that were not gods—before God reached right into the world and called him. God's call and promise created the faith to follow. And follow he did, leaving all that was familiar-hometown and kindred—and the gods of the world that were so comfortable—at the beckoning of God he didn't know, who promised him a land he had never seen and a blessing that would be for all people. As his last act of leadership, Joshua reminds the people of God that there are other choices...that are not choices. Choice is the essence of humanity. He will not remove their choice. He cannot make it for them. They must choose: God or... any number of gods; it really

doesn't matter which of the 'others.' Except, Joshua doesn't weigh all the options equally. Only One delivered them from slavery to the greatest power on earth, Pharaoh, whom his people worshipped as a god among gods. Only One led them through the wilderness, delivering them from the dangers of the journey and providing them with all they needed. Only One delivered to them the Promised Land, keeping his word to Abraham and his descendants. 'Now fear the Lord and serve him with all faithfulness,' Joshua pleads with them, so forcefully his plea is the closest a word can come to a command. As for Joshua and his house—his descendants—they will trust God and follow him. Like Joshua, the people must renounce all the other gods that they had held onto in secret all these years and still hold onto. Their choice? They say they will serve God alone. 'You cannot,' Joshua replies, 'God is holy...and jealous...he will not forgive it if you forsake him and serve foreign gods. Disaster will follow...because good alone comes from him.' The people repeat again they will serve the Lord. 'Then throw away the foreign gods among you and yield yourselves to the Lord,' Joshua bids them. A third time the people respond: God is their God. They have chosen. Joshua makes a covenant, repeating all the words of God and committing them to writing. He took a large stone and set it up as a memorial, a witness against them should they be untrue to the only true God. And the people are true...during the lifetime of Joshua and the other elders who had personally witnessed God's wonders. But what happens when those solid examples like Joshua, or Caleb, or Eleazar, son of Aaron, are gone and forgotten? The stone still stands its silent witness.

**Questions:** 1. Who helped me come to know the true God? How did their words and examples shape my own choice to follow God? How well have I kept faith with God's faithful people of the past, as reflected in his Word? 2. What does it say about God that God chose Abraham, even though he worshipped false gods at the time and loved the people of Israel, even though they still held on to false gods despite all God had done for them? What does it say about why God chose me to receive his salvation and be restored into relationship with him again through his Son? 3. What gods have I had in my life? What gods do I need to cast away even today?

**Luke:** Jesus is watching, in the temple of all places, where the offerings are given. What is he looking for? What he is always hoping for...looking for: Faith. 'Will the Son of Man find faith...?' He is barely hours away from sacrificing his life on the cross. A simpleminded widow gives all she has to live on. 'She has given more than all the others!' What? Than each of the others, or all of them together? Even the rich ones putting in such large sums? The others are doing what is required, offering their tithes, and some giving well beyond what is required—huge sums of money, as the world counts. But not God. God counts faith. She gave all she had to live on, trusting totally God's providing. The day will come, Jesus tells his followers, when you will be asked to put your life on the line. You will be asked to declare your commitment publicly...cross the line...take up the cross. By people who know you well. Tough times. Terrible times. But lift up your heads and hold them high then, because your redemption is drawing ever nearer. And by standing firm—persevering to the end—you will gain your life.' The right offering for God is yourself. The next time the offering plate passes by, put your Self in. **Questions:** 1. Have I offered God myself as a 'living sacrifice' (see Romans 12.1-2)? Do I do so daily in my

prayers, giving back to God each day as he gives it to me? 2. Where do I experience the most resistance to my following Jesus or witness to him? Among family members? Friends? Fellow workers? Why is it so hard for me to persevere among the people who know me best? Is it because they know my weaknesses and shortcomings? My spiritual poverty? Do I give even that to God to use, by humbly admitting my weaknesses and wrongdoing to magnify his grace towards me and everyone?

**Prayer:** God, I don't have as much to give as the widow. My heart's not that big. I'm still married to my comfort and controlling my own life. I will give...as I choose. I will be generous...as I decide. Why can't I abandon all to you? Why can't I just turn over all my relationships, all my prized possessions, everything I have and am to you? Ah. Christ did, for me. Christ gave because I couldn't...because I wouldn't. Well, if I can't, Christ can...in me. Form in me the Spirit of Christ. Mold and make me according to the character of Christ. Even if it takes the cross, make me new. Then I will be wholly yours. And until then, accept my two copper coins, my poor witness and service, as more than they are. Accept them in the light of Christ's sacrifice-his all, for all. Amen.

## Through The Bible In One Year: Week 16

### Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Joshua 24.14-27

Psalm: 89.1-8

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Luke 18.18-33 (or 19.1-10)

Theme: 'Go Ahead, Choose-Which Is Your God?'

#### Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 16:

At the heart of being human is the mystery of choice. Our choices define for all to see who we are, what our character is truly like, what is important to us. Joshua, like the good leader he is, puts the choice clearly and concisely before the people around him: Choose which god you will follow. He biases the choice by reminding them of all God has done for them. He has bent heaven and earth to keep his promises. He has fulfilled every one. Why would they choose any other, as if there really were any 'others.' He even lets the people know his own choice before they decide, so deeply does he desire that they choose rightly. Just so, in Christ, God is 'stacking the deck' of the decision everyone has. Will they choose him, who loves them so as to give himself on the cross for them? Or, as in the case of Zacchaeus, risks the rejection of society to seek and save the lost, who still matter to God? A rich man balks, while Zacchaeus walks through the open door Jesus has made and experiences new life. Why would anyone want to choose any other? God in Christ weights the decision in the direction of grace, but the weighty decision is still each individual's to make.