

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 19

Day 127. Read 1 Samuel 1.1-2.21; John 5.1-23;
Psalm 105.37-45; and Proverbs 14.28-29.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: I thought she was drunk! Can you believe it? Bickering and backbiting are the backdrop for the birth of one of the Old Testament's greatest prophets, and I mistook his mother for being drunk! When I heard the story, it seemed so pointless...and hopeless. Hannah, one of Elkanah's two wives, was childless. Her rival, who bore her husband sons and daughters, took pains to cause Hannah pain by reminding her of her barrenness every chance she got. Her husband loved Hannah dearly. He showed it by always giving Hannah a double portion of meat from the sacrifice when the family came each year on pilgrimage here to the Lord's sanctuary in Shiloh. That only made her rival more determined to provoke and irritate Hannah, and this went on for years. But once, after she ate and drank during the sacrificial meal, Hannah came into the temple weeping and praying in the bitterness of her soul. She was moving her lips but was not able to say one word: the pain was so profound. 'Get out woman!' I shouted. 'Have you no shame? Get rid of your wine!' When she explained, I was the speechless one. All I could say was, 'Go in peace, and may God grant you what you asked of him!' She asked for a son. She promised to dedicate him to the Lord all the days of his life. As priest, I've seen that so many times. They always do that. Bargain with God. It seemed so pointless. Hopeless. A child for a barren woman. Perhaps it was a punishment. When she didn't come with the family the next year, I thought, 'See! I knew it. Nothing happened. She is ashamed.' But then the very next year, she handed me a toddler! 'Here,' she said, 'here is the son that God gave me in answer to prayer, the one I promised to dedicate to God.' As I held him, I wondered: What is God doing? My own sons are worthless. They serve here in the temple, but they are selfishly looking after themselves, not caring for others. What will this Samuel be, born into a family in discord, given to God? **Questions:** 1. What is the bitterest part of my life right now? Do I take it to God in fervent prayer, as Hannah did? Do I believe that God will do what is best for me? 2. Have I dedicated the special relationships God has given me, whether that be friend, spouse, children or another, to God the way Hannah dedicated her firstborn son to God? How does that change the way I relate to them, knowing they belong to God and not to me? 3. What answers to prayer have I experienced personally?

John: ‘Do you want to get well?’ I could not believe it when he asked it. First, I felt anger rising in me. But when the words came out of his lips, they pierced right to the center of my soul. I was forced to look inward in a way I never had. I saw to my surprise...I really hadn’t. I hadn’t wanted to get well. I half-wished it. But it was my life...the only life I knew...kind of comfortable receiving the pity of all the people around me and having a ready excuse to be excused whenever I wanted one. The gifts kept coming steadily; the only price was my pride. Besides, it would never happen. A cripple healed after thirty-eight years of waiting? It was hopeless. But then he asked his question; and from a place much deeper within me, I felt a cry rising. Hope was rising again, being reborn after having died and been buried so many years. Yes! To be whole! That’s what I want. That’s what I have been longing for all my life! His next words astounded me even more, so matter of factly did he speak them: ‘Get up, take up your pallet, and walk.’ No incantation or fancy ritual. Get up. Walk. I could! I did! But then the strangest thing of all happened. There I was, walking home on the Sabbath, the first time I had been able to walk in thirty-eight years, and carrying my pallet, when the religious leaders stopped me. They accused me of breaking God’s law, by carrying my pallet on the Sabbath. ‘The man who healed me told me to’ I blurted out in surprise. And then they got angry with him. ‘Who is he?’ they demanded and...I couldn’t say. I didn’t know his name. He had healed me, and I hadn’t even thanked him. But later he found me...at the temple, praising God. The man is full of surprises. ‘Stop sinning or something worse may happen to you!’ he said. What could be worse than 38 years of being crippled...unless it was a future without knowing the Healer? Whatever it is, he cares for more than my physical body. He cares for my spirit...and life in eternity. His name is Jesus. I went and told the religious authorities, thinking they would want to know. They wanted to kill him, not just for breaking the Sabbath, they said, but for calling God his Father, making himself equal to God. He made my body whole, can he be the one who will give me the real life I long for...eternal life?

Questions: 1. What infirmity of body or spirit have I had to bear for a long time? Do I really want and believe I can experience the wholeness—life with joy, even in the face of an unchangeable situation—because of God in my life? 2. What questions does Jesus pose to me? How does he challenge me to discover areas of my life, character, or actions that need his correcting power? 3. Have I been settling for less than the wholeness God wants to give me and just being comfortable as I am, rather than rousing myself and working at his call and command, in some area of my life?

Prayer: God, sometimes I would rather be comfortably sick than uncomfortably made whole by you. It’s easier. There’s a ready excuse whenever I want one. I am so...fill in the word: weak, sinful, ignorant, hopeless. Forgive me for playing god over you and saying what you can or can’t, will or won’t, do. Do I want to be whole? Do I believe you can make me whole? Yes...somewhere deep inside...deeper than my surface fears or comfortable compromises...Yes. I want to be whole. Make me whole. And in the meantime, I will pick up my mat...I will get to work...at the work you have told me to do. For you, my Healer. And for all those around me who need your healing love and presence through me. Amen.

Day 128. Read 1 Samuel 2.22–4.22; John 5.24-47; Psalm 106.1-12; and Proverbs 14.30-31.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: Eli the priest was blind...to his own sons' rebellious and selfish abuses in God's temple against God's people...and to what God intended to do about it. But then a prophet warned him with a word about what God would one day do and even gave Eli an unmistakable sign: both his sons would die on the same day. And the prophet also gave a great promise from God: God will raise up a faithful priest who will minister before God's Anointed One, always. Now Samuel was ten. For years he had been ministering in the temple, even sleeping in it. One night God called him by name...and Samuel ran to Eli, who told him he hadn't called and sent him back to bed. A second time...and a third time; it was as before, God called and Samuel ran...to Eli. But then blind Eli finally 'sees' what God is up to and gave Samuel the crucial instruction he needed: "When the Lord calls you, say 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening.'" In God's amazing plan a blind priest mentors a young boy to know God personally, and the boy ends up being one of the Old Testament's most important prophets. God wants to speak with his children intimately and frequently, but so often they won't accept that. Everything depends on hearing and heeding God; but we believe God could never, would never, want to speak 'with me.' His call falls on deaf ears, and we remain blind to his will and way for us. **Questions:** 1. When have I been 'blind' to what God is doing in my life, or the opportunities that God lays before me to do his work which I overlook? 2. What causes my spiritual 'blind side,' that is, the factors that make it less likely I will recognize or follow God's leadings every day? 3. Do I believe that God really wants to talk with me and is interested in every detail of my life? What would most help me have the attitude of young Samuel, so I could say to God, 'Speak, Lord, your servant is listening' like him?

John: They diligently searched scriptures—studied it carefully—but finally missed the whole point. Ironically, it is the religious leaders who failed to recognize God's Son when he came, just as prophesied centuries before. Moses wrote about him a millennium before he finally came. Yes, he brings a great promise: 'Whoever hears my word and believes him who sent me has eternal life and will not be condemned; he has passed from death to life.' The Word of God who was with God and was God, who became flesh and dwelled among us full of grace and truth, is the one the scriptures—also called the Word—speak of. Eternal life begins now, not in some distant and unforeseeable future. Whoever hears and believes already has eternal life. That abundant life begins the instant that anyone hears and believes. **Questions:** 1. When did I first really see Jesus or meet God in scriptures personally, instead of just learning facts or ideas about God? 2. Since God's Word promises that my new and eternal life begins now, not in the world to come, how will that affect my attitudes and actions day by day, knowing with assurance that I am saved now?

Prayer: Speak, Lord; your servant is listening...sometimes...and sometimes with only one ear instead of my full attention. Right now I am listening. How many times do you speak to me and I can't hear...or won't hear? How many times don't I even recognize your voice above the constant clamor in my life and my mind? Help me to get into your written word more, so I can hear your living voice as you speak to me day by day. You will never go against your Word. It is in your written word I will know you and know when you are speaking to me. I want not only to hear you but to heed you— to do what you ask. Your Word is life, because you are life. Lead me deeper and deeper into your Word...and your life. Amen.

Day 129. Read 1 Samuel 5.1-7:17; John 6.1-21;
Psalm 106.13-31; and Proverbs 14.32-33.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: What do you do when you capture God? Show him off, of course. That's just what the Philistines do. They exult when they capture the ark of God from Israel, and they put it on display. The point of their victory is obvious. Obviously, their god, Dagon, is more powerful than the LORD, the God of Israel. Why else would Israel have suffered defeat? The other alternative was unthinkable: that the God of Israel had given the Philistines the victory over Israel. Surely it couldn't be that God was more powerful than their idol but had a deeper purpose than one particular victory on one particular battlefield. So they put the ark on display beside Dagon, their god. The next morning Dagon has fallen on his face in front of the ark, head and hands broken off, with the body parts lying on the threshold of the temple. The 'luck' of the Philistines turns bad, as tumors begin to abound, because the ark is in their midst. Their new dilemma: how do you get rid of God when he's overstaying his welcome? Give him away! The Philistines at Ashdod send the ark to their relatives at Gath. Tumors spread there, too, among both young and old of the city. The religious roulette continues. The Philistines of Gath give the ark to their kindred at Ekron. By now they are getting wise: 'They have brought the ark of God here to kill us!' they cry. 'Send the ark back to its own place!' And so they send it back, but not alone. They send an offering. Gold. Formed into the shape of the tumors. Five of them, for the five cities, as a guilt offering. With the ark, on a brand new cart. So one day the defeated Israelites see an amazing sight: the ark of God coming back on its own, on a brand new cart, with gold gifts sparkling in the sun. God has defeated the Philistines single-handedly and even received tribute from them, all by himself. The return of God to Israel sparks a return of Israel to God. Samuel, the last of the Judges to govern Israel says, 'If you are returning to God with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and goddesses; commit yourselves to God and serve him only.' The renewal is complete. Then God wins a victory over the Philistines for Israel. What a God!

Questions: 1. What victories has God won in my life that I had nothing to do with? 2.

What do I need to do to commit myself wholeheartedly to God? What 'gods' do I still need to get rid of, to follow and serve God alone?

John: What does Jesus expect of us disciples?! Crowds flocked to him because he healed the sick...and they hoped to experience some miracle like that themselves. 'Where shall we buy food for them all?' he asked us. Was that just the hint of a smile on his lips when he asked. It was that 'look' he had whenever he was up to something. Usually that meant we would be the butt...of some lesson he wanted to show us. We fell for it again. 'Eight months pay wouldn't be enough,' Philip replied without thinking. Andrew chimed in, 'A lad here has five loaves and two fish—all of 'em small—but what is that among so many?' He had us. 'Make them sit down.' Then he took them and blessed them, those small loaves and fish. He distributed them...and everyone had enough. Not only that, but there were leftovers—twelve baskets, more than we started with. Fooled again! The people were ready to make him king. Hey, we were ready to make him king! He could command anyone if he could fill their stomachs...at no cost. Jesus just disappeared...went up the mountain by himself. The man is a mystery. With such power, why doesn't he use it? Oh, yeah. He did use it, to feed people. I mean to seize the real power that he could have and really make a mark in this world. He's such a mystery, walking on water, without leaving any footprints, but forgoing a kingship through which he could really leave his mark in history. Who is this guy? Whatever is he up to? **Questions:** 1. How would I have responded to Jesus' question about feeding the people? 2. Are there situations I or my faith community face that I feel are hopeless because of limited resources, forgetting that God is involved? 3. How do I handle not knowing God's plan or purpose but still seeking to follow him everyday? Do I anticipate God working in wonderful and surprising ways in my life?

Prayer: I know how the disciples felt looking at the small loaves and few fish, against the immense need surrounding them. I am them. The discouraged disciples. The limited resources. That's me. But that's the point. That's me. I forget you, God. I forget that in your hands, with your blessing, the least may become the most. Help me stop looking at my limited self and start seeing your unlimited power and love, present in my every situation, day by day. Wherever you are present, there you can and will do amazing thing. Like make me overflow with forgiveness where there was only anger in myself. Like make me give generously, where there was only taking before. Like make me speak gentle words of invitation, where I was afraid to speak at all before. Yours is the power and the kingdom and the glory, God. Yours. Amen.

Day 130. Read 1 Samuel 8.1–9.27; John 6.22-42;
Psalm 106.32–48; and Proverbs 14.34-35.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: Samuel's just not the guy he used to be. Time to put him out to pasture. He's old and won't be with us much longer. His sons are like Old Eli's were—they just don't walk in his ways and can't be trusted. What we need is a king, just like everyone else. Then we won't be different from all the kingdoms around us. This relying on God to raise up judges like Samuel whenever there are problems is...well, a problem. I mean, how do we know someone's in charge all the time, someone we can actually see? How can we be sure that things are being attended to, the important things that give us peace and security...like commanding a standing army and leading us to war. Samuel just sighed and said 'You have no idea what you are asking. A king will conscript you, oppress you, and tax you until you bleed. You'll become his slaves!' Now, who was he kidding? We are smarter than that! We demanded all the more, so he agreed to talk it over with God. Now God's response was a real surprise. 'Go ahead,' God said, 'Give them a king. It's me they're rejecting, not you.' So God selects a king for us...a man with kingly stature, a head taller than everyone else, who is...out seeking stray donkeys. Stray donkeys? Could God be trying to tell us something? **Questions:** 1. Why do I strive to control my own destiny every day, instead of trusting God to guide me in every decision and deed? 2. In what ways do I look for security in the things and people of this world, rather than in God? What or whom do I lean on or seek security from in times of trouble?

John: How did he ever arrive at this place? There is something strange about this Jesus character. It just doesn't add up. How'd you get here, Jesus? One night has passed. Only one boat left. Jesus wasn't on it. We get into boats—without Jesus—and find him...clear on the other side of the lake? How did he get here? Ask him a simple question, and you get a puzzle to ponder as his response. True, he sure seems to know me and my motivation. 'You are seeking me, not because you saw the miraculous signs, but because you had your fill of the bread I gave you.' Okay, so I am in this for me and for what I can get out of being around him. Is that so wrong? It's just human nature, everyone looks out for number one. But then he urges me, 'Don't work for the bread which spoils, but the kind that endures eternally.' No expiration date on the loaf? An endless supply that will never dry up? And what work is he talking about? I asked him, and he answered with another riddle: 'The work of God is to believe in the one he has sent.' See what I mean. His answers aren't answers at all! They just raise more questions. 'The bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world?' Then he talked just totally crazy, like a real lunatic: 'I am the bread of life. Whoever comes to me will never hunger, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.' Never hunger or thirst? Never? Still, he did fill me with bread yesterday...and everyone else, too. But then he said something so close to blasphemy many recoiled in hatred: 'All the Father gives me will come to me...I have come down from heaven to do his will...My Father's will is that everyone who believes in the Son shall have eternal life and I will raise them up at the last day.' Sheer lunacy! Does he think he is God's Son? Does he think he can even raise the dead? How did he ever arrive at such a place? **Questions:** 1. What claims does the Bible make about Jesus that I find hard to accept? Do I have trouble believing that he is the unique Son of God, both truly human like me and, yet, also the Son of God, not by adoption as I am but by nature, sharing God's very nature? 2. Do I follow God, or Jesus as my Lord, because of

what he does for me, or simply because of who he is, the one worthy of all my love and devotion? Is my devotion to Jesus mixed? Why? 3. What sayings or commands of Jesus are hardest for me to accept and follow?

Prayer: How do you do it, Lord? You just swoop right into my life suddenly and leave me wondering: what will you do next? Your word comes to me as a strange mixture of comfort and question. It surprises me and challenges me. It fills my heart with peace and floods my soul with joy. Truly, you are the Bread of Life. You fill me in a wonderful way that makes me hunger more for you. And your Father. Feed me full, and set me to do the work you have for me, which is to live your Word. I do not understand what you are asking all the time, but I truly long to do what you want; so lead me, Lord. Lead me ever on. Amen.

Day 131. Read 1 Samuel 10.1-11.15; John 6.43-71;
Psalm 107.1-43; and Proverbs 15.1-3.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: Anointing oil poured over the head, a kiss, and suddenly Saul is king of Israel. That simple! Samuel even gives him a host of signs from God so Saul can be sure, if ever he doubted. Two men will meet you and say the stray donkeys you sought have been found. Three prophets will meet you by the huge tree in Tabor, carrying three young goats, three loaves of bread, and a wineskin. They'll offer you two of the loaves. Then you'll go to Gibeah where the Philistine enemy outpost is where you'll meet a band of prophets ...and the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them and be changed into a different person. But wait until seven days have passed until I come to offer the sacrifice God desires. It all happens exactly as Samuel has said. Except...for waiting the seven days. Samuel summoned all the people to celebrate Saul's coronation. To seal the selection, they cast lots to see who will be king, and Saul is chosen, where he has hidden himself among the baggage. Saul's first act as king was to summon all Israel to fight against an enemy attacking just one tribe. Using a little extortion, cutting an ox in parts to send with the threat, 'This is what will happen to your ox if you don't volunteer to fight,' Saul mobilizes the whole nation 'as one man.' The enemy defeated, the supporters of Saul as king call for any people who complained about Saul's selection to be brought forth and killed. Saul intervenes to save them. A king must not only be strong, but merciful as well, which is true strength. **Questions:** 1. How does it affect my courage and confidence in life to know that God knows everything about me and my life, down to the very least detail? 2. What does it mean for me that God has a 'call' upon my life - purposes for me to accomplish in this time and place God's put me? 3. How do I respond to those who criticize me or complain about my actions for God? With judgment or mercy?

John: After he said what he said, many of his disciples stopped following him. What was it exactly? For he said many things that day. 'No one can come to me unless the Father draws him?' Am I not sovereign in my personal freedom, to make such an important decision? Must I be 'drawn' rather than decide? 'No one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father?' So exclusive! Is he really that unique? The ONLY one?! Can't there be many messiahs or saviors who know God well personally, so as to show others how to find and know him? 'Whoever believes has eternal life?' Already? It can begin right now? Eternal life doesn't wait until the next life...until time gives way to eternity? It can happen here in the midst of time's ever-rolling stream that bears us all away? 'Unless you eat my body and drink my blood, you have no life in you; whoever eats my body and drinks my blood remains in me, and I in them.' How can I eat his body and drink his blood? How can I consume him and still remain in him? He is a madman, or a liar, or he is....Lord. After he said what he said, many stopped following him. These are hard sayings. Who can accept them? The ones who are drawn by the Father. The ones who have eternal life now. The ones who eat and drink his body and blood. The ones who believe. Will I, too, fall away? You really want to know, Jesus, don't you? It really matters to you whether I myself will stay with you...or fall away. Well, Jesus, to whom would I go? You have the words of eternal life. And eternal life is what I long for, because it means life with you. **Questions:** 1. Did God draw me to Jesus or did I decide to follow him? Could it be both at the same time, as love grows between two people drawn and deciding to be with one another? 2. Have I decided that Jesus is truly my life and totally my life? What other 'words' am I tempted to listen to in life than his call? 3. How is the eternal life he gives me invading my life in this temporal world now? What is the mark and sign that eternal life has already begun in my life?

Prayer: How filling is the morsel of bread, how sweet is the wine, your body, your blood, the bread of life itself. How gracious are you, my Lord and God, to be my nourishment by giving me yourself, your life for mine. How can it be that, as I feed on you in this holy Supper, and you abide in me, I abide in you? You within me, within you? The paradox pushed me far over the threshold of reason, across the horizon between this world and heaven itself, to taste eternity now. Ah, eternal life begins now in your sweet love, my Lord. How sweet is your love, my Lord, sweeter than any other wine this world offers. There is none other that I look for or long for. To whom else could I go? To whom else would I go? Not one, besides you. Forgive me when I lapse and listen to the siren whispers of this world, instead of your strong, steady call. Father, draw me to one who loves me so as to pour himself out for me like wine, because he loves you so! Amen.

Day 132. Read 1 Samuel 12.1–13.22; John 7.1-29;
Psalm 108.1-13; and Proverbs 15.4.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: Finish strong! A little thunder and lightning will do nicely. Samuel, about to die, decides to do just that: finish strong. He calls all Israel together and challenges them bluntly, 'Tell me right now; is there any way that I have cheated or wronged you? Tell me now, and I will make it right.' Samuel has not taken anything from anyone, and they confess that is so. 'Now listen to me, and I will confront you with the evidence of all the Lord's righteous acts he did for you and your ancestors.' He rehearses again the story of God's faithfulness. He lays before them, like Moses and Joshua long before him, a choice: follow God and his king; or if they rebel, God's hand will be against them. And then he gave them a convincing sign...or God did. Right then, at harvest time when normally it is dry and dusty, there comes at his bidding - thunder and rain. 'We have added to all the evil we've done by asking for a king—now ask God to forgive us.' Samuel doesn't say, 'I told you so,' though he had; he simply says 'Just do not turn away from the LORD, but serve him with all your heart.' The LORD is slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. For the sake of his own name, he will reject his people. And then old Samuel finishes strong: "Far be it from me that I should sin against God by failing to pray for you.. And I will teach you the right way. Just be sure to remember the great things he has done for you, and serve him with all your heart.' The king himself fails to follow Samuel's words. Rather than wait for Samuel, he impatiently and impetuously takes on the priest's duties himself. Because he won't listen, the kingdom is lost. The enemy doesn't allow Israel to have blacksmiths because they might make weapons, and so Israel is without swords in battle. But much worse, they are without their true weapon - God. **Questions:** 1. Am I 'finishing strong' by treating others justly and reminding others about God's great love for them, so I leave a legacy of faith for those who come after me? 2. When and where do I tend to take action impatiently and in my own way, rather than proceeding in God's strength? 3. Who are the 'Samuels' God has appointed in my life and in my faith community to mentor me and lead me to follow God faithfully? How well do I learn from them and listen to them? Thank them and show them appreciation for the legacy they are giving me to share with others, as they have with me?

John: Even his own brothers did not believe him. They dared him: 'Go to the feast in Jerusalem! Why hang around here in Galilee? No one who wants notoriety like you hangs around the backwaters. You should go where people will applaud the miracles you do!' Damning with faint praise is a time-honored ploy. Jesus responds in kind: 'That's easy for you to say, for the world can't hate you as it hates me; because I say what it does is evil.' Meaning they have sold out. Ouch. They go for the fun at the feast, leaving him behind. But he goes secretly. Wherever he goes, he goes secretly; because he carries the Secret inside himself. He waits until the week of feasting is halfway-finished before he suddenly appears in the Temple and teaches. Who is he? How can someone from Galilee teach with such authority and power? 'My teaching is not my own,' he responds enigmatically. 'It comes from him who sent me.' He is sent by the demons some say. 'Stop judging by mere appearances,' he commands, 'and make a right judgment.' How can anyone make a right judgment about him based on the evidence of what they see and hear? His own brothers do not believe in him. The religious leaders say he is demon-possessed. Can

there be another—a higher -human faculty than sight or hearing...or reason... by which to judge him? **Questions:** 1. Whom among my own family members and relatives do I need to reach with God's love, so they can have a living faith- relationship with God? How does their familiarity with me make it harder to talk about faith with a family member more than with a casual acquaintance? 2. If I had been present in the crowd at the festival to hear the religious authorities or known Jesus' brothers personally, what would I have said about whether Jesus is God's Son? Would I have judged 'by mere appearance' or made a 'right judgment' as Jesus talked about? 3. At what point(s) do I have to make the 'leap of faith' and go against what the world says about Jesus to trust totally in him and his words?

Prayer: Lord, I can't trust my eyes to see clearly any more. Help me to see myself, those around me, all the situations you put me in... through your eyes. Then I will see clearly. Left to myself, I will always leap to conclusions based on appearances, which really means: according to my prejudices and misconceptions. Let me make right judgments, which means, leave judgment to you. About all the situations you put me in. About others. And especially, about myself, for I will always think I am strongest where I am actually weak, and will always think myself weak, where in you and through you I could be strongest of all. Amen.

Day 133. Read 1 Samuel 13.23–14.52; John 7.30-53;
Psalm 109.1-31; and Proverbs 15.5-7.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: One person, plus God, equals an army. And, surprisingly, it is a nameless man who makes victory possible. The Philistines were occupying Israel. Jonathan, the king's son, tells his nameless, armor bearer, 'Come, let US go fight against the outpost.' Would he have gone alone? What might have been can never be known, but this we know. The nameless armor bearer responded simply, 'I am with you heart and soul!' These two are the pebble that starts the avalanche. The confusion and fear they cause spreads to the whole enemy army. The army of Israel, waiting for the pre-battle church service to begin (the ark to be brought and the priest to offer sacrifice), hears the confusion. There is no time to invoke God, because God is already involved in the battle. All Israel joins in, only to find the enemy already fighting one another. God has won the victory. All because of two. A prince, and a nameless, armor bearer. The king clearly does not understand God's way of warfare. He curses anyone who takes time to take nourishment and so weakens all his army. His curse falls even on his own son. He stopped to eat wild honey from the honeycomb, in the midst of the battle—'and his eyes brightened.' God provides the nourishment his soldiers need. **Questions:** 1. Who is your 'armor bearer' in your spiritual warfare in this world? With whom do you have such a strong spiritual friendship

that that other person 'has your back,' or that you can rely on totally to stand with you through whatever comes? 2. What is the enemy doing to oppress me? What parts of my life is he seeking to occupy and control? 3. What is the 'honey' that God gives me to strengthen me for my spiritual warfare? Do I take care to nourish myself in all the ways God gives me to be strong?

John: They are ready to pounce at the least sign of weakness, the tiniest of openings. The division is deepening. So many are amazed and ask, 'If the Messiah were to come, would he do more signs than this Jesus?' But many wander away, confused and unnerved by what he is claiming. The religious leaders pounce upon the opportunity, sending temple guards to arrest him. He only spouts more confusing, unsettling sayings. 'I am going where you cannot come.' Will he escape to the foreign lands far away? Where could we not find him if we tried? 'If anyone is thirsty, let them come to me.' Does he truly believe he can really satisfy anyone who comes to him... and everyone who comes to him? 'Whoever believes in me, out of their heart will flow streams of living water.' A river running from inside me? From me, who have my own thirst I cannot quench. Can this desert inside me become a spring flowing, which no searing summer heat can dry up? Can other thirsty souls slake their thirst from what flows out of me? Either he is crazy...or crafty...or the Christ! The people were divided, and the religious rulers pounced upon the opportunity the division provided to send their guards to arrest him. And they returned...empty handed. 'No one ever spoke like him!' they said. Their thirst had been slaked, too, for a time, with the taste of his new wine. **Questions:** 1. Why does a part of me always look for (and usually sees) weaknesses in others, including in Jesus? 2. Do I believe that only Jesus can satisfy my spiritual thirst? The spiritual thirst of everyone in the world? 3. How is the river of the Spirit flowing through me to others right now? ___ Torrentially ___ Timidly ____ Trickling___ Totally dry and dusty. What will strengthen its flow? ___ Getting into God's Word more ___ True spiritual relationships with Spirit-filled people ___ The Lord's Supper ___ Praying _____ Serving ___ Sharing my faith with people who don't know God ___ Worshipping faithfully ___ other (_____).

Prayer: Can I be dry and dusty, and at the same time, have a river running right through me? Lord, it surely seems so. But only when you supply the river. I know that I am so much in need, I cannot give anything to anyone by myself. My Self drains the liquid life out of the living things around me, if left to itself. But it is just then, when my need is most obvious to me, that your river of grace flows to me and through me, and you use me to shower someone else who shares my neediness with your living water. This is your Spirit, not mine. My part is to thirst for you and to accept your invitation to come. So I come, thirsty, for your filling, Lord. I come to be filled until I overflow with your Spirit for the desert places where I find myself, and for the desert people from which I come. Do your work, Holy Spirit, and transform this deathlike dryness into a garden again - as it was at the beginning and one day will be forever. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 19

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): 1 Samuel 12.13-25

Psalm: Psalm 107: 33-42

Second (New Testament) Lesson: John 6.53-69.

Theme: The Words of Eternal Life

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation:

Who will a person listen to in life? Everything depends on whom we are in relationship with and whether we will listen to them. If they lead us to life, well and good. If they lead us away from life, danger and disaster will surely follow. Israel wanted to assure their own security and surety by having a human king they could see and follow, rather than a God they could not see and never control. Trusting in God seemed too risky. And besides, all the nations and people around them had kings. Not one relied upon God to lead them, even though God is the source of our life. This loving God has woven it into the very fabric of the universe that every one of our human efforts to secure our own lives and control our own destinies will go wrong and end in disaster, so all things encourage us to seek and find him. Near the end of his long life, Samuel, the last of the judges appointed by God to safeguard Israel before they demanded a king like all the neighboring nations, warns Israel that if they and their king will not follow the Lord, both will be swept away. History shows they disregarded his words and followed their own inclination, as we all do. But when they experienced the disaster that followed, they sought after God. When Jesus came he made amazing claims: whoever believes in him will never thirst, but out of their hearts will flow rivers of living water; whoever eats his body and drinks his blood has everlasting life; whoever hears his words and believes in him has already crossed over from death to life. Because of these sayings that were so hard to believe—how could any person make such astounding claims? Many disciples stopped following him. Yet Peter and others confessed he was the Son of God and followed him saying: ‘You have the words of eternal life.’ All who follow him have the abundant life Jesus came to give right now even in the midst of the difficulties of life, and afterwards will live that abundant life for all eternity. Jesus, the one who loves us so much as to give his body broken and his blood poured out for all, is the one to listen to. He is the way to life.