

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 20

Day 134. Read 1Samuel 15.1–16.23; John 8.1-20;
Psalm 110.1-7; and Proverbs 15.8-10.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: In desperation, to stop Samuel for abandoning him, Saul reached out to stop Samuel- the prophet who had anointed him king-and tore his robe. Samuel immediately understood the significance of the impetuous action: God was tearing the kingdom from Saul and was giving it to someone better than he. Saul had been given an important mission by God: totally destroy an enemy who had themselves tried to annihilate Israel. Saul had accomplished most of his mission. He had conquered the enemy...but he spared their king...and, most importantly, the best of their animals which were supposed to be destroyed along with their owners. Everything was to be destroyed, so that nothing would become a snare to Israel...as it did. Instead, Saul kept the very best of the plunder, giving the excuse it was intended to be a sacrifice for God...and that he was afraid of the people and gave in to their demands. Saul presumed to take great liberty with God's instructions. 'To obey God is more than sacrifice, more important than worship rituals,' Samuel responds. Following God is all about relationship, not rules or rituals. Everything depends on listening to God and following his leadings. Samuel mourned for Saul the rest of his life. But after a time, God sent Samuel to anoint the new king. Who was the one who would be 'better' than Saul? Saul had a regal appearance. Jesse's firstborn son has a kingly look, too. 'That's him!' Samuel thinks, jumping to conclusions. But God only responds, 'Don't judge by appearance; I judge by the heart.' One after another seven sons of Jesse pass by... and are passed over. The last...and the least in the eyes of people...is the one chosen by God. 'Rise and anoint him,' God instructs Samuel. David's first role in the kingdom of Israel is to help Saul, the very one he has been anointed to replace. David plays healing music when Saul is tormented. He even becomes one of Saul's armor bearers—or bodyguard—because he is so faithful in serving. Even though he is king already in God's eyes, David serves Saul selflessly. David waits patiently, trusting in the Lord's timing. David shows true kingly qualities. Just so, one day, one of David's descendants will show true kingly qualities when he prays for those who torment him: 'Father forgive them...'

Questions: 1. Why and how do I seek to excuse or justify my own actions or inactions, when in fact I am avoiding doing what God plainly wants me to do? 2. Is there anything right now which God wants me to do that I am avoiding, like forgiving someone

who has wronged me, giving more generously to God's work, visiting or inviting someone for God? 3. How do I act toward my leaders at work, in society, or in my faith community? Do I tend to act presumptuously and impetuously like Saul, or serve humbly and respectfully like David?

John: No gray area here. The law was quite precise. Death by stoning. There was no question of innocence. There were plenty of witnesses. She was caught in the act. How convenient! She provided the perfect trap to expose Jesus, the notorious 'friend of sinners' and Messiah wannabe misleading all the people. We've got him between a rock and a hard place, quite literally. Either he will support the death penalty—which will mean turning his back on all those sinners he delights in socializing with and who are flocking to him—or he will side with sin so openly he will completely discredit himself to the relatively-moral masses of people. 'What should we do, Jesus? Come on, you tell us!' Their rocks are ready. Jesus did neither...or both. 'Go ahead...cast the first stone,' he says to them, 'if you yourself are without sin.' 'Go,' he says to her, 'and sin no more.' He doesn't excuse her or exonerate, he simply...forgives...her. He will forgive anyone who comes to him. The stones dropped from their hands, straight to the ground. Judgment—pronouncing sentence and exacting the punishment—belongs to God—not to human beings, finally. Everyone stands before the same judge. And everyone can have the same Savior. Whoever follows him will have the light of life to live by and will never walk in darkness, whether the darkness comes from without, or the darkness that is from within. **Questions:** 1. Why do I leap to judge, criticize, and condemn others so readily? 2. How is Jesus' word and guidance like a light for me to walk by? What do I need to do to turn up the intensity on the light he gives me to walk by? 3. Whom do I know who is being shunned or judged by society as unworthy, whom God cares for and wants to have a loving relationship with? What is God calling me to do about it?

Prayer: Lord, so many times I astonish myself by my own presumptuousness. I so easily pass judgment on others and administer punishment, as if it were my personal responsibility and...right. It is yours, I know. What is more, I know one day I and all people will stand before you. Before then, let me stand before the cross and learn to intercede for the wrong of others...just as your Son prayed, "Father, forgive..." And when the final reckoning comes, let me stand before the Judge who is my Savior, claiming only the forgiveness he so freely gave at the cost of his broken body and poured-out blood. I want to sin no more, but I still do. Don't look at that. Look at what he wrote in the dirt that day...with his blood: my sins, washed away by his forgiving love. And in the meantime, let me intercede for others lovingly...and forgivingly...just as he does. Amen.

Day 135. Read 1 Samuel 17.1–18.4; John 8.21–30;
Psalm 111.1-10; and Proverbs 15.11.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: It was such a one-sided fight! Between a behemoth of a man, a mighty, seasoned veteran who was the champion of the whole enemy army, and a little guy whose only weapons—his whole arsenal—were a sling and five, smooth stones. Goliath cursed David by his gods. ‘You come against me with sword and spear, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty,’ David said. The battle was boring. Anti-climactic is understatement. It was a real ho-hummer. One swing of the sling and bing! How could David dare such a battle with such a big enemy? Already long before this fight, God had proven his faithfulness when he delivered David from the lion and the bear. Kingly armor of the human kind had been offered him, but David declined: it only encumbered him so he could hardly move. David’s strategy? Float like a butterfly, sting like a bee. Float free...light and fast...through faith in the Lord, totally trusting him. ‘The battle is the Lord’s,’ David said with his shepherd’s sling, and five, smooth stones, and unshakeable assurance in the living God. Sting like a bee? A bee? The battle belongs to the Lord. Talk about fire **POWER!** **Questions:** 1. What giant-sized difficulties am I facing these days? My faith community of which I am a part? My secular community? 2. What difficulties and dangers has God already delivered me from, proving his faithfulness? 3. How confident am I that the battle belongs to the Lord, that God will win the ultimate victory? How does that affect my attitude and actions during times of trial?

John: You’ll get it later, Jesus says. ‘Hindsight,’ we say, ‘is 20-20.’ ‘When you have lifted up the Son of Man, you will know that I am the one I claim to be....and that I speak nothing on my own but just what the Father has told me to say.’ And, with that enigmatic promise, many ‘put their faith’ in him. They made the mysterious...essential... step of committing themselves and their lives to him on the basis of his words. They believed. It must have been both the words and his manner that made them believe. Something in his inflection. His tone. “Inspired” might be the word...inspiring. His words are enigmatic at this point, before the crucial fact that will authenticate everything he claims. After his crucifixion, and especially his resurrection to eternal life, everything will be much clearer. His claims will have a new assurance and certainly about them. But for now...despite the uncertainty, “Even as he spoke, many put their faith in him,” as the New International Version says. They trusted his Word, even before the historical event of his death and resurrection confirmed everything he had said. **Questions:** 1. Have I chosen to ‘bet the farm’ –stake my life- on Jesus’ Word? 2. How do I demonstrate my trust in Jesus’ Word? How has believing that changed my life, thoughts, words and actions?

Prayer: Lord, I know the story of your death on the cross...and what is more, of your resurrection to eternal life. You changed frightened disciples who had all fled when you were arrested, and who hid when you were crucified, into people who died proclaiming you are the Son of God, risen from the dead. Lord, even knowing, I still shrink back from all your cross and resurrection means. I can hardly believe all my sins are fully and forever forgiven. I am restored into right relationship with the Father through you. I can hardly believe...and much less live...that my salvation is a done-deal. There is

nothing more to add. Except to live. To live as you do, the resurrection life now. Lord, help me put all my trust in you all the time. Let me be like those who, even before you died and rose, placed their full faith in you and stepped out into the unknown, knowing through faith that you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. Amen.

Day 136. Read 1 Samuel 18.5–19.24; John 8.31-59;
Psalm 112.1-10; and Proverbs 15.12-14.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: He must die! Even my daughter loves him...and married him. My son...my successor...defends him and protects him. Don't they understand we will never be safe...any of us...if he is alive? So Saul is obsessed and driven with fear to forceful actions to secure himself against the danger he believes begins with David. It is really himself that is his enemy. Though David has already been anointed the new king by God, David serves King Saul selflessly... and successfully. To the delight and praise of all the army and the people, David is promoted to be a commander. Victory follows victory. David's mounting success becomes a sort of magic mirror revealing the sickness that lives in Saul's heart and spirit. Overpowered by his jealousy, with premeditation, Saul attempts to kill David, even as David plays his healing music to help Saul. Fear has overthrown the king, and the more successful David becomes, the deeper Saul sinks in fear, until he becomes completely obsessed with removing what he thinks is the source of his fear: his enemy. His unreasonable fear is made worse when own son and successor, Jonathon, loves David and defends him. Saul's daughter loves David and saves him from Saul's assassination plot. David flees, but Saul finds him, and sends soldiers to capture him...three times! Each time the Spirit comes upon the soldiers, and they are caught up in ecstatic prophesying, with the prophets of God nearby. Finally, Saul comes himself...and the Spirit comes upon him, and he prophesies. Even God's Spirit defends David. **Questions:** 1. What...or whom... do I fear? How does my fear disrupt my relationships and cause me to mistrust or mistreat others? 2. Do I believe God's promises to care for and protect me are true, even when events seem otherwise? 3. Is my trust in God's providence so strong that I can selflessly serve, even others who don't recognize or appreciate that service?

John: There was a lot of that going around: reaching for stones. First, the woman caught in the act of adultery. Now Jesus! No wonder they picked up stones to stone him to death that day. 'Abide. Dwell in. Hold to. Cling to. **Me.** If you abide—dwell in—hold to—cling to my words, you are truly my disciples. You will know the Truth. The Truth will make you Free,' Jesus said. 'You need to be freed. Whoever sins is a slave to sin, and slaves need freedom. Whoever belongs to God hears what God says. If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed. **Before Abraham was, I am!**' By saying that, he made himself equal to God. Either he is crazy—an egomaniac or crafty, manipulating the people for his own ends; or he is the Messiah, as he says he is. Could the way to life really be to believe and follow this man? Dare I make him my life...literally live and abide in his word, as if in the house

that is my home? It's either that...or pick up stones to put him to death. And just when they went to stone him, Jesus slipped away and hid himself. He must get what's truly coming to him...the cross. Only by the cross—by being true to God to the end—can he set sinners free. Only by abiding in the word of the cross can anyone discover life. **Questions:** 1. Do I really believe that Jesus Christ was truly both a human being and God in the same person? That his words have the authority of God and truth behind them? Do my actions daily show that I truly believe that? 2. What must I do to 'abide' or 'dwell' in Jesus' words or teachings? How is my 'abiding' going right now? What can I do to be more at 'home' in Jesus' words and teachings?

Prayer: God, make me more at home in your Word. Make your Word my home. Let me live in it. Let me live it every day. It is Truth and will set me free. For in your Word I meet and know and hear your Son, who is the Truth, speaking to me and showing me the way to life...the way to live. As I walk through this busy day and all the confusing situations I find myself in...let me rest at home in your Word. Son of God, Word made flesh, full of grace and truth, set me free...and I will be free indeed. Amen.

Day 137. Read 1 Samuel 20.1-21.15; John 9.1-41;
Psalm 113.1-114.8; and Proverbs 15.15-17.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: There is only a step between David and death. His survival hinges on the son of the enemy who seeks his life. King Saul has nearly murdered David twice, but both were in seeming moments of madness. Could the king actually be plotting his death? To save his life, David flees. Desperate, he approaches Jonathan, son of Saul, to find out why his father would want to seek his life. Suddenly Jonathan is caught between two loves: for his father, and for his friend. His bond to one is by blood, the other by oath before God. He and David are spiritual brothers, bound by oath to one another. The blood-bond speaks first. "He's not trying to kill you; for my father doesn't do anything without telling me," Jonathan responds in disbelief. David shrugs that suggestion off, saying Saul would not tell his own son of his plans for the very reason that he knows of the spiritual bond between them. That spiritual-bond speaks strongly next: Jonathan agrees to test his own father and find out once and for all his intentions. Hoping he will disprove David and restore the relationship between subject and king, he defends David before his father. When Saul flies into a rage, curses him, and even hurls his spear at him, Jonathan learns the terrible truth. Now he must decide. And act. Will he support his father—and keep alive his own hopes of being king one day himself—or side with his brother before God? He sends the agreed-upon signal that will save David's life. For one last time they meet. "Go in peace," Jonathan bids David, 'for we have sworn friendship with each other in the name of the Lord.' Jonathan has passed the test. He kept true before God, even to his own hurt. The kingdom will be David's, as God has determined, and Jonathan? Jonathan will die in

battle beside his father, true to him as well. When David and Jonathan parted for the last time, the Bible says, they kissed each other and both cried...but David cried most. He had lost his spiritual friend, someone who had proven that Spirit is 'thicker than blood;' and that because of spirit, David's life was more important to him than his own. **Questions:** 1. Do I allow my bonds of blood—kindred more power over my spiritual life than the spiritual bonds with fellow believers in Christ? Does my physical family hold greater sway over my spiritual relationship with God than my faith community or 'faith family?' 2. Have I developed deep spiritual bonds with other believers, so that I have true spiritual relationships that would help me in every need, just as I would help them? Who could become such a spiritual friend? 3. What would I be willing to sacrifice for my spiritual friends—my close brothers and sisters in Christ? For my faith family in general?

John: The disciples are perplexed. Who sinned? Of one thing the disciples are absolutely sure: someone must have sinned, for this man to have been born blind. But who? Was it his parents? Why then would God have him suffer the consequences of their sin? Was it him? How could he have sinned to be born blind as a punishment? In the womb? Was the punishment they believed God had meted out to him pre-emptive? With a word, Jesus sweeps their assumptions aside. 'Neither,' Jesus says. 'Just watch what God is going to do for him! It's so God's work might be displayed in him!' He is the poster child for God's power. A little spit-and-dirt mud pack, followed by washing in the pool of Siloam, and voila! He sees for the first time in his life. Disbelievers and doubters abound. It isn't the same man; he only looks like him. 'I am the man!' he insists. They investigate further to find who would dare do such a thing...on the Sabbath...breaking God's law...showing he is a sinner. The mystery deepens. How could a sinner work such a miracle...wouldn't God rather punish than reward him? What on earth is God doing here? The once blind man insists: 'Whether he is a sinner or not, one thing I know: I was blind, but now I see.' His reward for telling the truth is: he is cast out of the synagogue. Jesus heard and sought him out again...this doubly- unfortunate man who had suffered from blindness twice: from physical blindness...and from the blindness of people bound by the rules of human religion. 'Do you believe in the Son of Man?' Jesus asks him. 'Who is he?' the healed one asks? Who indeed! The One who gives sight to the blind, and who blinds those who are so sure they see and understand so much...even the mind of God. 'Lord, I believe,' he said. And he worshiped Jesus. Truly he does see. More than most. **Questions:** 1. What rules and rituals do I accept as God - willed, simply because they are what is familiar to me or what makes sense to me, but which have no foundation in God's Word? Have I ever been excluded or criticized for following God in opposition to human ways of thinking and acting? 2. Whom do I know who is suffering, whom I think perhaps suffers because they brought it on themselves? Does that stop me or make me hesitate to show them the care and love of God? Are there groups of people I tend to write off as beneath or beyond the concern of God? 3. What 'blind spots' do I still have in my life and character that need the healing touch of Christ? 4. Have I ever told Jesus personally, one-to-one, I believe in him and worship him personally for what he has done for me?

Prayer: God, like Jonathan and Jesus, let me side with others even to my own hurt, when it means siding with you, following you and reflecting your very nature. Form in me the character of Christ. Strip away all that blinds me and keeps me from seeing others and the opportunities you lay before me to befriend them. Jesus, right now I acknowledge you as Lord and worship you. May you be glorified, God, forever! Amen.

Day 138. Read 1 Samuel 22.1–23.29; John 10.1-21;
Psalm 115.1-18; and Proverbs 15.18-19.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: “No man is an island,” wrote the Christian poet, John Donne. Human beings were created to be fulfilled in relationship, and ultimately we are all interrelated. When one suffers, all suffer, in one form or another. David must flee from the wrath of King Saul to save his life, but he is not the only one exposed and vulnerable. All his kindred, his entire clan, must abandon their homes and hometowns to save themselves. Ultimately, they must all leave even their country—the promised land—to live in Moab. Why Moab? Again, because of the bedrock nature of relationships. David’s great-grandmother, Ruth, was from Moab. And besides, if someone is the enemy of your enemy, might that not mean they are your friend? At least, you have something in common—the basis of a relationship. The king of Moab is no friend of Saul, the king of Israel. Having provided a safe haven for his family, David returns to Israel, which makes his family even safer. Saul will not risk war against Moab if David is not there. David’s whole course is guided by God. He inquires of God what his next step should be through a prophet. A foreigner named Doeg, from Edom, informs Saul that Ahimelech and his family, all priests from the town of Nob, have helped David. Saul summons the prophet’s family, accuses them of treason, and orders their execution. None of his own men will lay a hand on the priests of God, so Doeg himself kills them. One son, Abiathar, escapes and flees to join David. “I am responsible for the death of your family,” David says to him “The one who is seeking your life is seeking mine. You will be safe with me.” They are bound together in relationship by having the same foe, fearing the same end, sharing the same loss. David and his band must keep moving constantly, for their foe never rests from seeking them, and his spies are everywhere. But strangest of all, Saul’s own son, Jonathan, seeks David out and helps him find strength in God. Jonathan makes a covenant with David, a solemn declaration of their relationship. “You will be king,” Jonathan says with astounding humility, “and I will be second to you.” Truly this relationship has its source and life in God, who alone can inspire such selflessness. **Questions:** 1. Who among my family and friends or acquaintances has been affected most by my mistakes in life? By my following Jesus Christ as Lord and the choices and sacrifices that involves? 2. Who among my relationships “has my back” (or looks out for me) spiritually to strengthen me in my relationship with God and life generally? 3. Even though I know I am to love my enemy as

Jesus bids me, whom do I tend to put on my 'enemies list' and get angry at anyway? What can I do to love them as Jesus bids me?

John: "I am," Jesus says. What? Or, who? Who or what are you, Jesus? Jesus makes some startling-actually astounding- claims: "*I am* the gate," and, "whoever enters by me will be saved." Not a gate, *THE* gate. Talk about a savior complex! Salvation comes through a relationship with him alone? But his outrageous claims don't stop there. "*I am* the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep." Jesus is the fulfillment of God's promise through his Old Testament prophets to come in person and shepherd his sheep—the people of God—personally? He lays down his life of his own accord? "No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord." Really? "*I am*" is the name God revealed to Moses from the burning bush. Now Jesus uses it of himself. No wonder the religious folk rebelled...and called for his crucifixion. He made himself equal to God! He must be crazy, or what is worse, crafty—having some evil design. In any case, he must be crucified. He says it himself, almost as if he's sealing his own fate: "The thief comes to steal and kill and destroy." He is subverting their religion, destroying their society, breaking the rules they've become comfortable living by. Could he be the Christ? The Good Shepherd God promised to send, who will lead God's people into the life they long for, by the still waters, in the green pastures, restoring their souls? He says, "I am." He says, "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." He's either crazy, or crafty, or Christ. How will I know? How can I decide what to do with him? **Questions:** 1. How has the 'thief' Jesus talked about, or the Evil One who seeks to destroy all the good God has done, caused problems in my life? How does he work to destroy my life and my relationship with God today? 2. Have I walked completely through "the Gate" by totally giving my life to Christ as my Lord, or am I still approaching the gate...or standing part-way in? 3. Where are the people closest to me in relation to the Gate? How can I help them know about and approach the Gate? Enter through the Gate? 4. What foretastes of the 'abundant life' Christ came to give me have I already enjoyed? What will that abundant life be like when I finally and fully enjoy it with him forever?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you are so wide open! You opened your arms wide on the cross to show that I and everyone I know or will ever meet or know will be welcomed by you into that abundant life we all long for and will find only with you. When such love beckons me, why still won't I abandon myself totally to you? In such arms alone will I be safe...and come fully alive. Holy Spirit, help me. Lead me through the gate to the one I love and long for...into the embrace of the One who loves me more than I am able to love. Amen.

Day 139. Read 1 Samuel 24.1–25.44; John 10.22-42;
Psalm 116.1-19; and Proverbs 15.20-21.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: ‘How can a simple piece of cloth cut from someone’s cloak sting my conscience so? It all seemed so obviously God’s doing. God gave my enemy into my hands! One simple motion and all my problems would be solved. He was helpless, answering the call of nature in a cave all by himself, without the bodyguard that accompanied him wherever he went. One quick stab and my enemy would have died without knowing what had happened, or who had killed him. My enemy...and my king. How could I lift my hand against the Lord’s anointed leader of our people? Instead, I cut off the corner of his robe and accosted him and stole away again. And now even this piece of cloth sears my soul. How could I do such a thing, and harm even the hem of his garment?’ So David ordered his men not to attack...and kill...King Saul who sought their lives and David’s. Outside the cave, he called to Saul, showed him the cloth and asked him, ‘Why do you listen to people who say I want to harm you?’ The evidence of David’s love and reliability is a little piece of cloth...and a helpless enemy kept alive when totally in his power. **Questions:** 1. Do I ever ‘lift up my hand’ against the leaders God has put over my community, or especially my faith community, undermining or criticizing or gossiping about them? 2. When God arranges things so that someone who did me harm is suddenly in my power to repay or punish them, what do I do? 3. Who right now is acting like an enemy toward me? How can I show them Christ-like love and caring? How can I become more like David...and Jesus...who did good to those who sought their harm?

John: ‘My sheep listen to my voice.’ Can it be as simple as that? Knowing the voice so well...being so familiar...hearing that voice so often...that I would recognize it anywhere, whether it is whispered in the stillness of the night...or crying loudly in the raging storm? ‘My sheep listen to my voice...and follow me.’ It’s not just about hearing the voice...it’s about heeding. Hearing and heeding. To love is to listen...and to follow. Some took up stones to kill Jesus, when he said, ‘I and the Father are one.’ They hear him...but they do not listen...or follow...or love. **Questions:** 1. How good am I at recognizing God’s voice when he speaks to me in my daily relationships and situations? 2. What will help me most to recognize and follow his voice when he speaks to me: ___ Reading scripture more ___ Getting together more with other Christ-followers for real, spiritual relationships ___ Worshiping more so I hear more preaching on God’s Word ___ Bible study with others ___ Personal prayer time ___ Other (_____)? 3. When I do understand what God wants me to be or do? Why is it so hard to do it? What things make it hard for me to follow Jesus?

Prayer: Jesus, when you prayed on the cross for your enemies, you prayed for me. I have lived so much of my life as your enemy. I still am your enemy, when I walk away from you...or walk a different way than you would have me walk. Yet, you pray for me even then...especially then...‘Father, forgive...’ And you and the Father are one. I know he hears you. I know, for your sake, he loves me. Lord, truly be my Lord. Batter down and break part the barriers the evil one or the world or I, myself, build between us, so that I hear you speaking to me, and heed. You love me so much you want to speak with

me often. Let me love enough to listen for your speaking...and follow you whenever you call. Amen.

Day 140. Read 1 Samuel 26.1–28.25; John 11.1-53;
Psalm 117.1-2; and Proverbs 15.22-23.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: Twice! Twice God has put David's deadly enemy under his power, and twice David fights off the temptation to take judgment into his own hands. With one of his most trusted lieutenants, David boldly steals into Saul's camp. His partner is prepared to kill Saul, sleeping and helpless, but David rebukes him. 'How can anyone be guiltless who lays a hand against the Lord's anointed? The Lord himself will strike him - either when his time comes and he dies a natural death, or in battle.' It won't be David, whom Saul thinks his enemy, who will kill him. When Saul awakes, David shouts to him and shows him his water bottle and spear. Saul knows David has spared him again. "Is it you, David, my son?" Saul calls him. His tormented mind achieves a moment of clarity, to recognize that David has been faithful to him as a son. 'Come back!' Saul cries out to him, but there can be no reconciling so easily to one who has sought to kill him. The brittle bonds of trust have been broken. David flees with his men to the Philistines for refuge. They are gathering their forces for war against Israel. They remember that David has led Israel's armies in war against them. David even feigns madness, to throw off their suspicions. With war looming, and God silent to his requests for guidance, Saul desperately seeks, against God's command, to contact among the dead someone who had once been his friend. Samuel speaks from beyond the grave words Saul is terrified to hear: 'Tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.' The judgment David left to God is coming.

Questions: 1. How do I use the power God has given me, however limited, in my community of faith? To be a 'Kingdom builder' and build others up, or to establish my own little kingdom where I can be important or powerful? 2. When others wrong me, or threaten those I love, do I take responsible actions but leave the ultimate judgment to God, or do I seek vengeance myself? 3. Am I ever tempted to compromise with the world or seek strength from powers other than God, like the occult, in order to feel more secure or discover what may be coming in the future? Do I put credence in a 'horoscope' or superstitions that influence my actions?

John: What a comic scene! We laughed till we cried. The man comes stumbling out, the mumbling mummy, wrapped in the grave cloths, struggling to move his arms and unable to move his mouth freely because his whole body is bound tightly. We didn't know whether to weep or roar with laughter. The moment before we were all aghast at the gruesome joke Jesus seemed to be playing on the mourners. 'Take away the stone!' he commanded. Even the dead man's sister balked. 'He's been dead four days...can't you smell him?' she replied.

'Didn't I tell you you would see the glory of God?' Jesus chided her. Then he says, "Lazarus, come out!" As if the dead man could hear him? As if death itself had to obey him. What a horrid practical joke to play! And it was. A practical joke....played on death itself. The man came out, mummified and mumbling some indecipherable sounds, like an excited child in a sack race. 'Unbind him and let him go!' Jesus had to tell us, for we were all standing around in awe...and laughter. Perhaps he really meant what he had said moments earlier when he told Martha, the dead man's....no, I mean the live man who was the dead man's sister ... "I am the resurrection and the life; ...whoever lives and believes in me will never die." Eternal life comes through him. To all who believe and live in him, death itself dies. The greatest practical joke of all time! **Questions.** 1. How does the certainty that comes from knowing that death itself has no power over me because of my faith in Jesus change the way I live everyday? 2. How does Jesus' power over death help me help others who are mourning or fearful of death? 3. Whom do I know who is mourning, or hurting, or having some difficult time, that I can minister to for Christ? As Jesus first wept with the mourners, how can I really empathize with them in their situation and demonstrate Christ's loving presence with them? When the time is right, how can I speak a powerful word of hope to them for Christ?

Prayer: God, I know I will die one day...unless you bring in your Kingdom fully before that time comes. I know in my mind I will die one day, but there is something inside me that denies that, that doesn't even want to consider it. I fear death... somewhat... sometimes...even though I know you are Lord, with complete power over life and death both. It's not me. It's my old self. You remember, the Self that believes it's god, that dreams it's a god, and a god by definition is undying. Except your Son, the God who died on a cross, so that I, who am dying, might live with you forever. Forgive my old Self playing god still, which only leads me into confusion and fear. Lord, I believe you are the Resurrection and the Life. Let me live confidently and freely in that wonderful truth...and so make me free to live for others, comforting all who are afraid and by their fear of death, bound in their living as was Lazarus was in the grave. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 20

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): 1 Samuel 24.1-12

Psalm: 116.1-9

Second (New Testament) Lesson: John 11.21-27, 33-45.

Theme: How To Live Truly Alive!

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation:

Jesus, who earlier in this week's appointed scripture readings has said that he is the Gate to eternal life and the Good Shepherd who lays down his life for the sheep, raises a

dead man to life again. He proves that he has the power of death itself, backing up his claim to actually be the resurrection and the life by his deed of power. In the "I am" passages where he echoes God's name revealed to Moses in the burning bush, Jesus states his purpose or mission: "I came that they might have life and have it abundantly." The way to living life fully now...and forever...is through faith in Jesus Christ, which transforms our own character to become more and more like Christ. The greatest expression of Christ's godly character comes when he loves and prays for his enemies; for, as some poet has said, 'To err is human, to forgive divine.' To forgive even one's enemies who have sought one's harm is truly divine. It takes supernatural power. David has his enemy in his hands, but shows mercy, leaving judgment to God. David lives the abundant life now, confident that God will work out all things for his best. So do all who know and believe that Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life. He is our life now...and forever.