

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 23

Day 155. Read 2 Samuel 22.21-23.23; Acts 2.1-47;
Psalm 122.1-9; and Proverbs 16.19-20.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: The long journey is nearing the end. As the end of his long and eventful life approaches, David lifts up a song of praise to the faithful God who was with him every step of the way. God had delivered him from all his enemies: bears and lions, a warrior-giant, a paranoid king who sought to put him to death, and even his greatest enemy: himself. 'With your help,' he proclaims, 'I can charge a troop of enemies; with my God I can leap over the enemy's fortress wall.' He had experienced God's deliverance many times. What was left for him now, this man whom God had taken from watching over sheep and made him shepherd of a whole kingdom? Praising the One who watched over him his whole life. Proclaiming the faithfulness of this Living God to all who would listen, so they, too, could experience his faithfulness...and join in his praise. **Questions:** 1. At this point in my life's journey, do I feel more like praising God or wondering what on earth God is doing? Is it possible to do both at the same time? 2. If someone were to ask me how God had delivered me from troubles or dangers I have faced, what would I tell them? 3. Do I take time to tell God in prayer or worship or serving or telling others about him how much I love him for all he has done for me? How will I tell or show him I love him today? This coming week?

Acts: Fire! On every person. Flickering flames. They are alight with the warmth of God's living, loving presence: the Holy Spirit. Jesus kept his promise. They waited and watched for the day they would receive power from on high. It was a power they had never known before. Supernatural power. They all began to speak of the mighty acts of God to people they could not communicate with before. God had bridged the differences and distances between them and the others. Peter the denier becomes Peter the proclaimer through the working of the Spirit, the power from on high who now has made him his dwelling in the world. This power is highly infectious. Three thousand succumb to it after one brief, spirited message. No tongues of fire over their heads...the Spirit shows in their deeds as well as words. They devote themselves to the Word spoken to them through the Apostles, to real spiritual relationships called fellowship, to worship in which they received Christ's real presence, his body and blood, in the broken bread and poured-out wine of

the Lord's Supper, and to prayers, that most intimate way of communicating with God. It's infectious. The fire spreads further. They sell their possessions and give generously to anyone who has need. They worship together in the Temple and meet in the intimate, spiritual fellowship where they minister to one another in home, small groups. And God added to their number...those who were being saved...whose meaningless existence was experiencing purpose, whose unending sadness was discovering joy, whose death was giving way to the true, abundant life Jesus died and rose to give. They were being saved.

Questions: 1. Have I asked God in prayer for the Holy Spirit (see Luke 11.13)? Do I know that the Spirit lives in me? Does anyone around me know I am Spirit-filled because of my spirited actions and words? 2. Of the Marks of Discipleship displayed in Acts 2.42-47 (reading the Word, real spiritual fellowship through relationships, worship centered in the Lord's Supper, praying, giving generously, serving others' needs, and sharing my faith through witnessing) which is most developed currently developed in me? Which needs the most work? What's the next step? How can I deepen and develop my walk with and for God more?

Prayer: Giver of all good gifts, fill me full of your Holy Spirit. Set my heart, my mind, my body and soul on fire for you. Overflow from me, Holy Spirit, with praise to the loving God who created and redeemed me, that I may be his forever. Flow through me to the others you have put around me so they, too, experience the fire of your love for them, seek your life-giving fullness, and set some one else on fire themselves. To be glory and praise now and forever through your holy Church in heaven and earth. Amen.

Day 156. Read 2 Samuel 23.24-24.25; Acts 3.1-26;
Psalm 123.1-4; and Proverbs 16.21-23.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: And the number is 1,300,000. At the height of his power, when his rule is consolidated and all his enemies are subdued, David's worst enemy—himself—arises again. Was it vanity...or a desire for deeper security...that made him order a count of his available troops? Were they his source of strength...or his glory? Or was God truly his strength? His blunt and brutal army commander, Joab, attempts to talk him out of his plan to count all the fighters in Israel; but David won't be dissuaded. 1,300,000. David is conscience-stricken when he realizes his mistake...when no sense of security comes from knowing the military might that is available to him. Consequences come quickly for putting his trust in something other than God. In yet another display of mercy, God gives David the choice. Will the consequence be a famine that lasts three years, an enemy that pursues for three months, or a plague that lasts for three days? All three could have come, but there is mercy even in the choice between them. David lets God decide. Better God's mercy than the mercy of human beings. So the plague comes; and as it comes to Jerusalem, God calls a halt: 'Enough!' There is even more mercy. As he sees the plague spreading, David prays

to God: 'I am the one who sinned, these others have done no wrong; let your hand fall on me.' The innocent die for the guilty. One day the innocent Son of God will die so everyone who sins might have eternal life. **Questions:** 1. What is my worst act of folly and pride today? How has God dealt with me about that? With judgment? With mercy? With both? 2. Who has suffered most in life because of my mistakes and sins? What have I done to make amends?

Acts: He hoped for money, because he had given up hope for what he truly wanted. In fact, he might never have even entertained hope, since he was born deformed. He had to be carried every day to the temple to beg for gifts from the good hearted people worshipping. Did his heart ever burn with envy or bitterness as people blithely passed by, hurrying on healthy legs into the temple, where he was himself prohibited by law because of his deformity? Two men came that day, and his eyes burned holes in them. His gaze was so intense—whether with longing, or pain—that they marked him. They were penniless, but they were rich beyond his imagining. 'No money have I, but what I do have, I give to you: in the name of Jesus, walk!' Walk?! He danced! He leapt! He jumped, and hopped and skipped like a little child, he who had never had a childhood. And he went...into the temple...to praise God! On his own feet, he who had been excluded and kept out because of his deformed feet! The people came running together. They recognized him...the man who had been made new. 'By faith in the name of Jesus this man is healed!' is the testimony of the two poor men, who are so very, very rich and generous. **Questions:** 1. What is the biggest barrier keeping me from coming closer into God's presence through a deeper relationship with him? 2. Have I settled for a lesser good, like the man lying outside the temple looking for handouts; or do I truly want to be 'healed' into full life with God? 3. How does my worship life compare to the spirit of the man who was healed? Am I leaping and praising with all my might? How truly thankful am I?

Prayer: God, so often I put my hope and trust in things other than you. I settle for lesser things, satisfied and content to eke out an existence day by day, rather than risk turning to you for true healing and life abundant. Most often, I am looking for my own personal gain and good, rather than truly wanting you. Everything is a lesser thing, when compared with you. You are the source of life itself. You give healing and wholeness. But Lord, let me never settle even for healing and wholeness. Let me never value even these good gifts more than you, the Giver. You are what I want and long for. You are all I need. Let all else fail and fall away; with you, I am content. Amen.

Day 157. Read 1 Kings 1.1-53; Acts 4.1-37;
Psalm 124.1-8; and Proverbs 16.24.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Samuel: It is said, 'Power corrupts, and infinite power corrupts infinitely.' David is old - staring death in the face. Who will be the next king? Who will hold all the power in the land? David hasn't provided for succession of leadership. David's oldest son, Adonijah, who is next in line by physical descent assumes, 'I will be king.' He acquires all the trappings of the crown prince apparent. He got chariots and horses and fifty body guards, conferred with the commander of the army and the high priest for military and moral support, and invited all his brothers and the officials to his coronation banquet. Only, he pointedly does not invite all David's sons or officials: not his brother, Solomon, or the head of David's bodyguard, or Nathan, David's prophet. A clear divide is drawn between who is in and who is out. The divide can mean life or death itself. David, like a doting old man, seems unaware... or unconcerned. Bathsheba, Nathan and, especially, Solomon are not. Their lives are on the line. They conspire to put Solomon on the throne. In a carefully choreographed plot they 'remind' David of his promise that Solomon would succeed him. David acts decisively: with an oath he declares Solomon will be king, calls in the high priest and the head of his bodyguard. In a quick series of actions that would make your head spin, they anoint Solomon king, announce it to all Jerusalem; and Solomon, with crown on his head, ascends the royal throne. Adonijah's party is spoiled, and all his guests flee in fear. They have bet on the wrong horse. Adonijah himself flees for refuge to the temple and refuses to come out unless his brother, the king, swears he won't put him to death (as he might well have Solomon). Solomon, already wise, responds, 'If he acts worthily, not a hair of his head will be touched. But if not, he will die.' All power is in Solomon's hands now. How will he use it? Will it be in a way that pleases God? **Questions:** 1. Where does whatever power and influence I have in the various arenas of life (family, friendships, work, neighborhood, community groups, faith community) come from? Do I tend to minimize or even deny the power or influence I have, like the elderly David in this story? 2. How do I exercise that power, particularly toward those who question or challenge my authority? 3. Do I use that power to please God? How? Am I training up or mentoring someone to be an influencer for God? Who?

Acts: The powers oppose Peter and John. They are disturbing the peace. These two rabble-rousers are proclaiming Jesus and the resurrection of the dead! In the temple! What next?! The temple guard and the powerful Sadducee party who taught there was no resurrection put them in prison. But even more people believed them. The number is growing exponentially. The high priest and all the powerful men of his family questioned them intently: 'By what power or authority do you do this?' Their response? The power of the Crucified One. The power of the Risen One. Jesus of Nazareth. He has healed this man. Salvation—the fullness of life now and forever—is found in no one else. There is no other power that will save. When they saw the courage of these uncomplicated, uneducated men, the powerful, religious leaders were astounded. And they recognized they had been with Jesus. They ordered them never to speak in Jesus' name. They might as well have been telling the sun not to rise. **Questions:** 1. Do people recognize that I "have been with Jesus" in the spirit demonstrated through my words and actions? 2. How can I be 'with Jesus' more day-by-day, so I reflect the life-giving authority and influence Jesus gives? What spiritual disciplines will help me develop a closer relationship and

acquire more the character of Christ? 3. When I experience opposition to my life and work for Christ, what do I tend to do? Boldly persist? Give in or compromise?

Prayer: God, you made me in your image and likeness, and you put me here in this time and place, that I might care for and influence your world for you. As if that weren't enough, you redeemed me through the death and resurrection of your Son, Jesus. He chose and commissioned me to influence the world around me for him. He commanded me to make disciples, people who follow him and influence others for him themselves. By your grace, I am part of a great chain of believers. Because of that chain that stretches back to Jesus himself, and through Jesus to you, I will live forever. There is no other name under heaven by which anyone will be saved. Draw me closer to you, and let your saving power flow to me and through me, so others may live forever with you...and so your heart will be filled with joy! Amen.

Day 158. Read 1 Kings 2.1–3.3; ;
Psalm ; and Proverbs.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Power, once in hand, must be held securely. But how? Solomon, recently ascended to the throne and still feeling insecure, moves quickly to consolidate all power in his hand. David's last instructions encourage decisive action. Mark Joab! David's army commander had assassinated two other commanders in times of peace in order to keep his power. Remember Shimei who called down curses on David in Absalom's rebellion. David is listing all the dangerous ones. To David's list, Solomon adds another: his brother, Adonijah, the older and rightful heir, if physical descent were all that mattered. After David dies, Solomon moves quickly. When Adonijah asks Solomon for David's consort as his bride, Solomon seizes it as an occasion to act. One opponent is removed. Joab recognizes in the news that the purge has begun. He flees to the temple for refuge, but Solomon sends his commander to kill him right beside the altar. Two gone. Shimei is put under house arrest; and when he violates it three years later, probably assuming he had a right to, he is summarily executed. 'The Kingdom was now firmly in Solomon's hands,' the story says simply. Power once grasped, must be held securely...but how? What kind of king will Solomon be, now that all power is in his hands? **Questions:** 1. Who is on my 'enemies' list' right now? 2. Why are they my "enemies"? Is it because of my anger at being wronged or my need for feeling secure that makes me see them as enemies? 2. Jesus said to 'Love your enemies' and to "go with them a second mile.' What does he want me to do toward my 'enemies'?

Acts: 'First impressions are important,' we are told. Look good. And we are told, 'appearances may be deceiving.' So the game of pretense begins. Look good on the outside and hide what is on the inside. No one will see. No one can see. Give the gift to God.

No one will know what is withheld...what part is put aside and kept for my own control. A husband and wife conspire to keep something back for themselves, and, yet also, have the benefit of their community of faith respecting them for their generosity. They lie. They pretend. The Holy Spirit knows and reveals it. The consequence comes quickly. Their spiritual hearts are already dead...their physical hearts follow. God knows the heart. They could have given the amount they wanted and kept the other for their use. God did not require they give it all. God only wanted their hearts, not their money. God wanted their hearts, because only in that way would their hearts experience true life in freedom and generosity—only that way would they have a heart like God's. **Questions:** 1. Am I joyful and generous in my giving to God's work, or do I do so grudgingly? 2. Am I honest to God and others and myself about the spirit in which I give? 3. In what ways do I put on pretense in my relationship with God or my work for God? How can I be thoroughly transparent and honest? 4. Do I have a spiritual guide, friend, or companion I am totally honest with? If not, who could become such a spiritual companion to keep me honest?

Prayer: God, there is so much pretense in my relationship with you. I 'put on a happy face' often, when I really feel sullen or sad inside. I glaze over things with glad words, when I am really angry inside and nursing a grudge. I make the motions of giving generously, but part of me is holding back. I still reserve the right to my Self and insist on all my rights, rather than giving myself totally to you. That's the honest truth. That's the truth I seldom let anyone see...never let anyone see. But you see. And you still love. You grieve...and ,yet, you still give your grace to me...generously beyond belief. That's the heart I don't have. That's the heart I want. Give me your heart, that I may truly give...myself totally to you...and for you. Amen.

Day 159. Read 1 Kings 3.4-4.34; Acts 6.1-15;
Psalm 126.1-6; and Proverbs 16.26-27.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: A 'blank check' ... from God? 'Ask whatever you want me to give you,' God told Solomon. Solomon asks for...wisdom. Not more power through wealth or the destruction of his enemies. Not even long life. He wants wisdom. And God is pleased. Greatly. So God goes to his great storehouse in heaven and takes wisdom down from the shelf and gives it to Solomon. The special kind. The kind of wisdom no one else has had, has, or ever will have. And, yet, Solomon displays in his very request the kind of wisdom which everyone can have. It is at everyone's fingertips: the wisdom of choosing to please God, not themselves. And, no surprise, this generous God who delights in giving, gives Solomon much more than he asks for. He gives him what he expressly did not ask for. He gives him what he actually does not even need: wealth, honor, and long life. He doesn't need these things at all, if he seeks what he truly both needs and wants: God. His wisdom

pierces the darkness of the world. Conflicting claims and confusing conjecture. A child is restored to its right mother. God's restorative, life-giving work is getting done, here in this dark world; because someone asked God not for what they wanted, but what they needed...to please God. **Questions:** 1. If God granted me anything I wanted, what would I ask for? 2. What do I want from God, and what do I truly need? What is the difference between a need and a want? 3. What is the biggest puzzle or problem facing me right now? How can I tap the wisdom of God to approach and address it? Is there a wise, spiritual friend I can benefit from?

Acts: Growth brings its own set of problems. Christ's body, the Church, suffers growing pains. As God adds people being saved, tensions continue to increase as well. People are being transformed; but until the transformation is complete in everyone, problems will persist. Suspicions of favoritism and neglect arise. People demand their rights, forgetting that God calls people to serve and not be served, just as Jesus served. The problems even threaten to overwhelm the Apostles and deflect them from their main work for God: proclaiming the Word of God. The Apostles propose a plan to turn over the daily care of the physical needs to wise, Spirit-filled people; so they, themselves, can concentrate on their own crucial, spiritual tasks. All the people agree, and seven are chosen to lead this work. A crucial, spiritual principle is put in place—another important building block in God's plan to redeem the world. The people of God are all ministers, and the work of God is a partnership that will recognize—and need—the individual gifts and callings of all. Each person is a partner in God's plan. The story says simply: 'The Word of God spread and the number of disciples in Jerusalem spread rapidly.' **Questions:** 1. How am I gifted for service in God's plan to redeem the world? 2. What troubles and problems is my faith community suffering now? How am I called to help?

Prayer: Lord, you served...and by serving, you saved. You saved me. You gave me new life, when I needed it most—even when I didn't know I needed it. You served by giving yourself. And I am saved. Let me serve, because you served. Through my service, add others who are being saved to the growing list of those sharing your Life. Let me strengthen and support all your servants, and especially the servants who bring your Word. Let your Word of Life spread until everyone has heard and had opportunity to know and follow you who are the Way, the Truth, and the Life. Amen.

Day 160. Read 1 Kings 5.1–6:38; Acts 7.1-29;
Psalm 127.1-5; and Proverbs 16-28-30.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: What to do, now that all is well? Solomon has 'rest on every side.' No enemies threaten, from without or within. He decides to build a temple for God and makes a deal

with the king of Lebanon to exchange wheat for wood. Peace between neighboring kingdoms results. But already dark clouds are forming in the distance. Solomon conscripts laborers from all Israel to complete his building projects. Thirty thousand men are sent, ten thousand a month, in a three month rotation, to Lebanon to help with the work. Seventy thousand laborers haul huge blocks of stone from the quarries, the work of eight thousand stonecutters. All the final, fitting work was done away from the temple; so that not a hammer, chisel or any tool was heard at the temple site. In the midst of the building, God sends word to Solomon: 'If you follow my decrees and carry out what I command—if you will let me be your king—I will fulfill the promises I made to David and live among your people.' God's word, and not a temple, will be the place God lives among his people. Solomon spent seven years building the temple. Finally, the Ark of the Covenant is placed in the Holy of Holies. The stage is set. The curtain is going up on a new scene in the drama of salvation. The question is posed: how will God dwell among people? **Questions:** 1. What does God really want from me? Things? Or a heart turned and tuned totally to him, hurrying to do what pleases him? 2. Do I show in actions and giving support for God's house, the place and the ways God meets with and nourishes his people?

Acts: On trial for his life, Stephen is given an opportunity to defend himself. He is charged with speaking against the law and the temple, the two pillars of the religion society prized. He is accused of saying the Jesus would destroy the temple and change the customs handed down from Moses. As his defense, Stephen simply tells the story of God's strange way of working. Joseph, rejected by his brothers, becomes their savior. After being sold by them into slavery, he rises to be ruler of Egypt and provides the food they need to live, while the world languishes in famine. Moses, raised as a foreign prince of the people who enslaved Israel, murders an Egyptian, to save one of the slaves. The slave rejects the actions of his would-be savior. Moses must flee for his life. A lawbreaker will one day become Israel's savior...and lawgiver. Truly, this God acts in the most surprising ways and chooses the most unlikely saviors. **Questions:** 1. Do I know the story of God's working to redeem the world well enough to understand it? To explain it to others? 2. Have I been active enough in living my faith to be called to explain or defend it? 3. What would I say to someone who asked me to explain what I believe about Jesus, why I believe it, and how it has changed me?

Prayer: Lord, I want to show I love you. You don't want things. They are only important to you as they help in bringing about what really pleases you: people living with you, in love, forever. I thank you that you have claimed me and called me to that life through the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, your Son. Make me a faithful witness in my day. In my inviting words and servant actions, may others around me recognize Christ's own reflection. May they meet the One who loves them so much as to die that they might live. Amen.

Day 161. Read 1 Kings 7.1-51; Acts 7.30-50;
Psalm 128.1-6; and Proverbs 16.31-33.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Kings: Seven years were spent in building God's house. Solomon took thirteen years to build his own. Solomon got the best artisan available to make the furniture and fixtures of the temple, a foreigner imported from a neighboring city state, whose father was a gentile, but whose mother came from Israel. When all the beautiful objects had been completed, Solomon moved them into the temple, along with all the precious objects David himself had dedicated to God. The temple was a treasure...and a treasury. Great wealth was spent on it, and great wealth was stored in it. It took seven years to complete. But Solomon's own house took thirteen. **Questions:** 1. Am I, like Solomon, more concerned for building up what benefits me or what builds the kingdom of God? 2. On the list of things I treasure most, where does God and my relationship with God place?

Acts: The audience may be unsympathetic, but Stephen continues to spin the story that explains his strange (to them) trust in Jesus. He reminds them of things in their own story they might well want to forget. Moses, the murderer, is chosen by God to be savior. And even after he had been God's instrument to deliver them from their bondage as slaves, the former slaves rejected him and in their hearts turned back to Egypt. They would rather be slaves than free. Instead of following the God who set them free, they made gods of gold for themselves. The man rejected by the very ones he wanted to save becomes God's chosen savior. Solomon built a house for God; but this God cannot be kept in a box, however big or beautiful by human standards. This God cannot be controlled, he is in control. **Questions:** 1. In what ways am I tempted to put God 'in a box' and keep certain areas of my life under my own control? 2. What about the cross is offensive to my own self-image and understanding? Do I balk, even in part, at the idea that my own sin and brokenness are so extensive and intensive that Jesus had to die for me? 3. What does the fact that I need a savior do to my self image? Put it to death or make it fight harder for survival and supremacy?

Prayer: Lord, my old self just won't die. It doesn't want to die. It wants to live and reign forever. It rejects the very idea that I need a savior. A god shouldn't need a savior. And if I were to choose a savior, it wouldn't be one who dies in weakness, despised like a common criminal. It would be one who wielded great power, who enjoyed great privilege, who delighted in great possessions. My savior would be....like my Self. But you know better. You know what I need. Truly. O, Crucified Savior, save me from my self and set me free to be who—in you alone and through you alone—I truly am: one redeemed to be remade in your likeness. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 23

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): 1 Kings 3.5-15

Psalm: 127.1-5

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Acts 4.1-13.

Theme: “They Recognized They Had Been With Jesus”
(Or ‘Simple People of a Profound God’)

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation:

God chooses simple people who, when they rely upon him and trust in him, become more than just his instruments, they become truly his partners in totally transforming the world. The young Solomon, newly crowned king, wondering how on earth he will lead the people God has entrusted to him, asks for wisdom instead of wealth, or victory over his enemies, or long life. Peter, the fisherman Christ turned into a ‘fisher-of-men,’ boldly proclaims Christ to the religious leaders: “There is no other name under heaven by which people must be saved.” The religious leaders recognize by Peter’s spirit and courage, as well as his words, that ‘he had been with Jesus.’ They see Christ reflected in his own courage and confidence. God takes simple people and turns them into miniature models of his own Son, shining forth with his own character and likeness.