

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 31

Day 211. Read 2 Chronicles 26.1-28.27; Romans 13.1-14;
Psalm 23.1-6; and Proverbs 20.11.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Chronicles: Sweet sixteen and already a king! When his wayward father was assassinated, Uzziah is made king at the ripe old age of sixteen; he followed in his father's footsteps, all of them, both early and late. He began in a strong and close relationship with God during the days of Zechariah, but later he lost that. He loved the soil and had many workers who kept his farms and vineyards. He amazed an army of well-trained soldiers ready to march into battle, and he equipped them with all the weapons they needed to wage war. He sought our brilliant engineers to make machines to fire arrows and stones mounted on Jerusalem's wall. He fared well in wars with the enemies who bordered on his kingdom. Because he was close to the Lord, the Lord helped him wonderfully until he became very powerful and famous. The power went to his head, and he became proud - so proud, in fact, that he went into the Lord's Temple, into the Holy Place that only the priests could enter and personally burned incense to God—taking on himself the task God had assigned to the priests. The high priest and eighty other priests bravely confronted him. Rather than meekly receiving correction, the king became angry and refused to relent. Instantly, leprosy broke out on his forehead. At that, the king himself was grateful when the priests rushed him out of the temple. He lived alone and never was able to reenter the temple until the day he died. His son, Jotham, was put in charge of the palace. And when he became king in Uzziah's stead, Jotham did what was right in God's sight like his father Uzziah; except he never entered the temple to burn incense himself. He became powerful like his father, but he was careful to live in obedience to God. His son, Ahaz, forgot the examples of both his father and grandfather and followed instead the custom of the kings of Israel. He worshipped idols and even sacrificed his own son in the fire. Judah was now prey to enemy nations surrounding them. He appealed to the king of Assyria for help, who oppressed him rather than helped. As the trouble grew deeper, so did Ahaz's apostasy. He offered sacrifices to the gods of the countries that oppressed Judah and even shut the doors of the Temple, so no one could worship the Lord. The pride of the leader proceeds the downfall of the led. Judah is ripe for destruction. **Questions:** 1. Have I ever become proud of God's favor and taken for granted or presumed on God's love for me, so that I get in the way of God's plan and purpose for me or for others? 2. When I am put in roles

of leadership, whether in my family, work, or faith community, how do I exercise leadership? Do I seek God in every decision and deed or follow my own ideas and desires?
3. When times grow tougher, am I inclined to turn to God more or less? Where else am I tempted to look for security when times are tough?

Romans: Taxes?! Please, not taxes! Yes, even taxes. Good government is from God; for God is a God of order, not chaos—which is to say, a God of life, not death. Leaving aside the problem caused when government goes a different way than God intends and instead oppresses the people in its care, God has given us authorities to help us have life. People are made in God’s image and likeness, which means relational beings. Christ-followers pay their taxes and render respect to all leaders to whom it is due. But Paul urges us to even more: ‘Pay off all your debts except one. One debt alone you must never...will never...pay off: the debt of love.’ Love toward your neighbor fulfills all requirements of God’s law; for love does no wrong to anyone. Keep paying your debt of love all the more faithfully because time is running out. Literally, with every passing day, every passing minute and moment, time, which seems to us like an ever-rolling stream, is running out. Dawn is breaking, and the sun is just about to rise. Live as in the light already. Let Jesus Christ control your thoughts and deeds, your very Self, and fulfill the law of love. **Questions:** 1. Where does the darkness still linger in me? How can I bring into the light of Christ the corners or areas of my life I try to keep control of for myself? Who can be a spiritual friend and guide to help me deal healthily with these areas? 2. Am I living as a good citizen and neighbor for those around me, showing the love of Christ in my actions as well as words, so people are built up for God? Do I pay my proper taxes, vote in elections, and participate in community concerns, motivated by my love for God and neighbor? 3. Which ‘neighbor’ is hardest for me to love? What can I do this week to show them Christ’s love?

Prayer: Father, this thing about loving your neighbor is over the top. It’s just too tough. I can’t handle it. They can’t either. They always drop the ball, and I get worked up. Or I drop the ball, and they get worked up. What’s that? You say this is exactly why you give us our neighbor? This is why you command us to love our neighbor, because we can’t do that; we can’t possibly love you...because we aren’t like you, unless we love our unlovable neighbor? My head is spinning! This much I know; you love me, though I am so often unlovable. All right, then. In this way only will I be lovable—literally love able: I will love others with that very love you extend to me. It won’t be my love, but yours that I give...or pass on. Draw me deeper into awareness of your love given to me, and I will learn to love just like you. Amen.

Day 212. Read 2 Chronicles 29.1-36; Romans 14.1-23;
Psalm 24.1-10; and Proverbs 20.12.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Chronicles: He opened the doors of the temple and repaired them. He did it in the first month of the first year of his reign. King Hezekiah reversed all his father had done before him. “I intend to make a covenant with the God of Israel, so his anger will turn away from us,” he instructed the priests and temple workers he called back to minister God’s worship in the temple. It took them eight days to carry out all the unclean things from the temple, things used to worship idols and false gods. Eight more days were required to consecrate and purify the temple for God’s worship. The very next morning King Hezekiah gathered all the city officials and bowed in worship. The priests were too few to handle their responsibilities and sacrifices, so the temple workers helped them until additional priests had been consecrated. The worship of God had been reestablished the way God asked for it to be. **Questions:** 1. What needs to be cleaned out of me and my life as God’s temple today, so he can be honored and worshipped rightly in me? 2. How does my faith community need renewing? Are there ways we have closed the doors to others knowing and worshipping God? 3. Is it time I renew my covenant relationship with God? What does that involve in terms of me changing?

Romans: Do you recognize who that other person is? Someone else’s servant, that’s who! Someone with a capital ‘S.’ You know, the big Someone. So don’t go getting worked up about disputable matters. Bear with the one who is weak; don’t grind them into the ground. Don’t look down on any other believer. He stands or falls to his own master. She belongs not to you, but to him, even as you do. And they will stand, all who believe, whether weak or strong; because that Someone is able to make them stand. Each one of us will give an account of ourselves to God, not to anyone else. So, stop passing judgment. Stop putting stumbling blocks in front of others. The kingdom of God is not about externals, like eating or drinking (or refraining from them) but about right character, peace of spirit, and joy. Anyone who serves Christ that way is pleasing to God and people. Keep human customs between yourself and God, and don’t ever destroy the work of God—a human person—for the sake of human customs. **Questions:** 1. Why do I tend to place too much importance on disputable things surrounding my faith? How can I hold tightly to essential things of the faith and loosely to everything else that is non-essential? 2. How do my own personal preferences, in worship style or prayer or dress, for instance, which have nothing to do with what God requires, cause problems for others? Am I causing anyone to stumble in their relationship with God or keeping anyone from coming to a relationship with God? 3. How will my words and actions be different when I remember that all other people are God’s servants and not mine to condemn or correct?

Prayer: Oh Lord, my own temple needs cleaning, so why do I worry about everybody else’s? I strain and struggle over unessential things and forget or forgo the most important: remembering that the other person is someone so precious to you that you would do—actually did do—everything you could for them to live with you. Anyone on the way to you is acceptable to you. Truly, you will make them stand. That means me, too. So, help me to stand others’ criticism and not criticize. Help me to hold tightly to what is central and loosely to what is secondary. Give me the wisdom to know the difference. Amen.

Day 213. Read 2 Chronicles 30.1-31.21; Romans 15.1-22;
Psalm 25.1-15; and Proverbs 20.13-15.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Chronicles: The temple was cleansed again, open for worshippers. But who would be welcomed? Hezekiah sent messengers to everyone in Judah... but he didn't stop there. His vision ran much further than his own people in his own kingdom. He sent messengers throughout the land of Israel as well, even to the very people of Ephraim and Manasseh who had rebelled and waged almost relentless war against Judah. He wrote letters himself inviting them. All were invited to celebrate something that had not been celebrated for centuries: Passover, the feast of God's deliverance from slavery. Only a remnant remained of the people God had brought out of slavery, because their descendants had returned to a slavery of their own choosing. But everyone who remained was invited. "Return to the Lord," Hezekiah wrote, 'so he may return to you; for the Lord you God is gracious and compassionate and will not turn his face from you if you turn to him.' Hezekiah knew God well. On the appointed day, a great crowd gathered to worship God their redeemer. Even though the people who came from Ephraim, Manasseh, and the other rebellious tribes of Israel had not purified themselves according to the laws of Moses, they, too, were allowed to eat the Passover, contrary to what was written. Hezekiah himself prayed to God for them. He himself provided a thousand bulls and seven thousand sheep, and the other leaders provided as much more; so all the people could participate in the sacrificial feast. And even the aliens—the foreigners who resided in Israel—were welcomed. There was great joy in Jerusalem again, the city that had seen so much bloodshed and infidelity. A great renewal began throughout Judah. People faithfully brought their gifts and offerings to carry out the work of God and care for the Temple. It is simply written of Hezekiah, 'In everything he undertook, he sought his God and worked wholeheartedly; so he prospered.' What an epitaph! **Questions:** 1. How big is God for me? Whom do I believe he can be in me and through me, if I seek him and work wholeheartedly for him? 2. How far and wide does my vision of what God wants of me extend? Whom has God put in my sphere of influence that I am to serve and reach for him, to include them in his redemption? Am I limiting that sphere of influence or the people I can reach because I doubt God's ability to use me to reach that far through me? 3. How does the knowledge that I am invited to God heavenly banquet, along with everyone else, change my attitude and actions in life? Am I more becoming more gracious and generous, like Hezekiah, because God is so gracious?

Romans: It's all so other-worldly. The strong bearing with the failings of the weak? Not in this world! Not living to please ourselves? Please! Going out of our way to please our neighbors and build them up? Do unto others before they do unto you, this world says. But who wants to live in this world and like this world? There is another world to live in

and from, while we live in this world. 'Accept one another,' Paul writes, 'just as Christ accepted you, to bring joy and honor to God.' There it is: the Alien influence. God came into the world in Christ to accept us and connect us with God. Now we overflow with hope; we who had been so hopeless. We have been infected from outside, with the infectious love of God that heals us only to give us a fever like the One who healed us has. Paul, the persecutor of Christians, now becomes the proclaimer of Christ to all who will listen, longs to take the good news where Christ is not known...to other cultures...other worlds, as it were. 'Boldly go where no one has gone before' was his motto long ago. That's the trouble with this counter-cultural, otherworldly love of God. It's highly infectious. Once you have it, you want to infect other people with it; so they can be whole and wholly alive. **Questions:** 1. Am I living and loving like Christ so that I am a 'counter cultural' influence in my relationships and community for God? 2. Whom do I have trouble accepting, just as Christ accepted me? 3. What persons or group of people am I overlooking, even though God has put me in contact with them, to serve and reach them with God's love?

Prayer: God, it's so hard to imagine the magnificence of the banquet you have invited me to. My mind cannot wrap around the scene. Course after course coming, shared with the most surprising people. There are people present I would not have anticipated. In my imagination's eye I see them. And I see the surprise in their eyes as they see me. I don't belong; they don't belong; but we all belong, because you have invited us to the great and grand banquet of freedom. Thank you for including me. I am starved, and I can't wait to sit down to the feast and slake my hunger. But let one hunger rise up in me and remain all my life: your hunger that everyone I know sit at the feast with you. Lord, let me labor to include them, as you labor to include me, with the undying hunger of love. Amen.

Day 214. Read 2 Chronicles 32.1-33.13; Romans 15.23-16.7; Psalm 25.16-22; and Proverbs 20.16-18.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Chronicles: The most powerful army in the world is camped at your doorstep, preparing to attack you. What do you do? What do you say? Make strong your defenses? Hezekiah did so, when the king of Assyria came thinking he would conquer the little, upstart kingdom of Judah for himself. Rally the troops? Yes, so did Hezekiah: 'Be strong and courageous, and don't be afraid or discouraged,' he told the troops. How could he even think of putting up any kind of a fight? How could he even contemplate talking so boldly before his vastly outnumbered soldiers? "There is a greater power with us than with him," Hezekiah said. "With him is only human power, but with us is the Lord God to fight our battles." There. That's it. God. When the king of Assyria sent a message for Hezekiah and all the people saying, 'The gods of all the lands we conquered were not able to deliver

them, so what makes you think your God can deliver you from my hand?” Hezekiah and the prophet, Isaiah, cried out in prayer to God. Soon all the enemy fighting men and leaders were annihilated still in the camp, without anyone even lifting a weapon to fight against them. The king of Assyria withdrew. He had met his match. He had met God. Hezekiah’s son, Manasseh, reigned even longer than his father. For fifty-five years he ruled Judah, but he led them all that time in the opposite direction. He worshipped the gods and goddesses of the surrounding nations, the very ones the Assyrian king had defeated. He practiced witchcraft and sorcery. He even sacrificed his sons alive in the fire and put a carved image—an idol—in the temple of the Lord where God alone was to be worshipped. God spoke to him and the people again and again through the prophets, but no one would listen. How much difference just one generation can make. How quickly people can turn away...and forget what God has done for them. Carried away captive to Assyria, Manasseh cried out to God. God had compassion and moved his captors to return him to Jerusalem. Only then did Manasseh know that God is God, when he experienced God’s deliverance so undeservedly. **Questions:** 1. Who has been my biggest encourager in following Jesus Christ? Who has ‘been there’ for me in faith when times and spiritual trials were toughest? How can I show my appreciation for them? 2. As Manasseh sacrificed his sons in the fire to worship a false god, what have been the ‘false gods’ I have been tempted to give my time and devotion to? What have I inflicted on the others around me by following false paths spiritually, in terms of heartache or lost opportunities I’ve caused others? Have I done everything I can do to make amends? 3. As God tested Hezekiah to know everything that was in his heart, how and why has God ‘tested’ me? What effects does God’s testing have on me?

Romans: He had run out of room. Quite literally, he had worked himself out of work. Paul, along with others, had literally started so many churches throughout Asia Minor and the Greek peninsula, that there was no more need for his kind of work for God there—taking the good news of Jesus Christ where it had not been heard before. What to do now? Retire? Rest for a while? No way. More work. New work. Spain! No one had lifted up Christ there. Having fulfilled his vision for serving Christ, Paul took on a new vision...a greater vision. He sees farther than he ever had at the beginning. Paul enlists the help of those who were the fruit of his first vision to introduce Christ through Asia Minor and into Europe. “Join me in my struggle by praying to God for me,” he asks the Christians at Rome to whom he writes. He sends greetings to partners new and old: Greet Priscilla and Aquilla and the church that meets in their home; greet Epenetus, the first to come to Christ in Asia Minor; greet Mary, who worked so hard for the church at Rome; greet Andronicus and Junias, Paul’s relatives who spent time in prison with him for the faith. All these had helped him in his old work. All would be partners in his new work, if only by prayer. **Questions:** 1. How am I being a partner and supporter to Christ-followers who are spreading the good news in my community, nation and the larger world? How am I extending the kingdom myself in my own words and actions toward those around me? 3. What vision do I have of what God can accomplish through me? How big and daring is it? Is it big enough to honor God, his almighty power, and limitless love?

Prayer: God there is so much work to be done! So many people need still to know that you love them personally and that life abundant is waiting for them, if they will but turn to you. My work isn't even near finished. Your call to me may not take me to the ends of the earth like Paul, but you have called me to serve and share here in my community, among the people you have put me in relationship with. Keep my eyes open to the opportunities you place before me, and give me courage to answer your call immediately when it comes. Let me make the most of every opportunity you give me, because each person is precious to you; and it gives you joy whenever someone experiences your compassion and kindness through my servant acts or inviting words. And it gives me joy to give you joy! Amen.

Day 215. Read 2 Chronicles 33.14-34.33; Romans 16.8-27;
Psalm 26.1-12; and Proverbs 20.19.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Chronicles: Delivered from captivity, Manasseh totally changed his tune. The turnaround is complete. He got rid of the very foreign, false gods he himself had placed in the temple and restored the altar to the Lord he had allowed to fall into disuse. What is more, he took the humbling step of telling the people of Judah to worship the Lord, even though he had once personally led them in worshipping idols instead. The people didn't follow his counsel, though. They continued to sacrifice to the false gods at the hilltop shrines. Ammon, his son, learned nothing from his father's experience. He worshipped and sacrificed to all the idols his father had made, and he never humbled himself as Manasseh had. All the spiritual instability had caused political instability. His own officials conspired and killed him in his palace. The people then killed all who had conspired against him, placing his eight year old son, Josiah, on the throne. In a most surprising turnaround, young Josiah followed God in a way not seen since David himself ruled in Jerusalem. At eight years old he sought the God of his ancestor David. At twelve he began to cleanse Judah and Jerusalem of all the shrines of false gods and all the idols that were worshipped. He spread the renewal even to the territory of the northern kingdom that had rebelled and been carried captive to Babylon. In cleansing and repairing the temple, the book of the Covenant was found—the scriptures—long lost and forgotten. When he learned from the scriptures how far they had fallen from their relationship with God, Josiah tore his royal robe in mourning and repentance. The renewal was fanned into white-hot flame with the finding of the Word. As the Word was read and proclaimed by Josiah, the people took it to heart and practiced it. Josiah led everyone in Jerusalem, Judah and throughout Israel in renewing their covenant and personal relationship with God. As long as he lived, the account reveals, the people followed the Lord. The problem was, Josiah did not live forever. One day, as God had promised to David, God would raise up a descendant of David who would rule forever. Then the restored relationship would

last forever. Josiah was a reminder of God's promise and its fulfillment certain to come.

Questions: 1. Do I encounter God in a life-changing way through his Word, as Josiah did? Have I truly 'repented,' which means, experiencing God turning toward me and me turned toward God, totally, in response? 2. What can I do to experience in a fuller way the presence and power of God in his Word? Get involved in a small group that is centered in God's presence through his Word? Teach it to others? 3. How can I share God's Word with others, so they come to know God and the new life he offers everyone?

Romans: Wise and innocent, both. That is what Paul wants believers to be. Look out for obstacles, for they are sure to come. They have already come, in fact. Watch out for those who are causing divisions and raising roadblocks in your way, Paul wisely warns the believers in Rome, who are real people, as the long list of names and relationships proves. They face real opposition. There are already false teachers, proclaiming things contrary to what they had learned from Paul and other apostles. By smooth talk and flattering ideas they will deceive the naïve, if possible; so be wise about what is good and innocent about what is evil. Have nothing to do with those false teachers, who serve their own appetites, not the Lord Jesus Christ. Despite their schemes, believers are not to worry. 'The God of peace will soon crush Satan under your feet,' he declares confidently, closing his words with, 'To God who has the power to establish you in faith by the apostle's teaching and the proclamation of Jesus Christ, the revelation of the mystery hidden for ages but now revealed and made known through the scriptures, be glory forever through Jesus Christ!'

Questions: 1. How can I be both wise and innocent, as Paul bids me? How can I become wiser, so I won't be led astray by false teachers? How can I be 'innocent of evil' as I face false teachers or people who would lead me away from the truth revealed in God's Word? 2. What is the 'mystery hidden for long ages but now known' through the prophecies of the Old Testament Paul talks about? How can I summarize the good news about Jesus in a concise way, so I can share it with people when given opportunities? 3. Who would I put on the list of Christ-followers, like the one Paul concludes his letter with, who have been significant in my knowing and believing in God? How can I show them my gratitude and respect?

Prayer: Lord, keep me steadfast in your Word. Holy Spirit, enlighten my mind to understand the truths of the Word. Empower me to put into practice everything you teach me, and keep it preserved in my memory. Thwart the Evil One who would steal your truth away, confuse the faithful, and keep the Word from bearing fruit in us and through us. Bless and strengthen all who teach your Word rightly, and protect your people from the pretense and power of false teachers. Use me to support your apostles today—the people you have called and sent—to proclaim your Word truly. Thanks and praise to you for the glorious Good News of forgiveness and new life through faith in your Son, Jesus Christ, and his sacrifice on the cross! Amen.

Day 216. Read 2 Chronicles 35.1-36.23; 1 Corinthians 1.1-17;

Psalm 27.1-6; and Proverbs 20.20-21.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Chronicles: While the balance of world power is shifting around them, Josiah led the people in celebrating Passover, the festival of God's freeing Israel from slavery to the king of Egypt. He appointed priests to their duties and encouraged them. He gave directions to the temple helpers, the ones who instructed the people of Israel, telling them to prepare themselves according to the directions King David and Solomon had made. Josiah himself provided 30,000 sheep for the people to sacrifice and have for the festival meal. They did everything according to God's Word, as written in the Book of Moses. The Passover had not been celebrated like that since the time of Samuel, before David became king. None of the kings of Israel had ever celebrated the Passover as Josiah had. Perhaps made overconfident by celebrating Passover, or expecting history to repeat itself in God winning a victory over Egypt, Josiah marched out to fight Neco, king of Egypt, who was passing by with an army to attack along the river Euphrates. Neco warned Josiah off, because God had appointed him to fight against Babylon, not Judah. 'Stop opposing God,' Neco warned Josiah, 'who is with me, or you will be destroyed by him.' Josiah would not listen. Though in disguise, Josiah was mortally wounded by the archers. At his death, the prophet, Jeremiah, himself composed laments for this king who followed God so faithfully. His son ruled just three months, until Neco deposed him and installed his own puppet king. That king is conquered by Babylon and carried off captive. A Babylonian puppet king is installed, who after a time rebelled against his master. The apostasy is complete. Jerusalem is conquered; its mighty walls and fortresses broken down. Its spiritual protection is destroyed as well: the temple is burned down to the ground. God had sent his messengers to win back his people, but they refused to hear or heed his call. They kept trying to follow the customs of the people around them, worshipping their gods and goddesses; so they got what they wished in a way unanticipated: they were carried away to the land of foreign gods. Through Moses God had commanded a yearlong Sabbath rest for the land every seven years, during which time God had promised to provide all they needed. Now the land had its neglected rest—during the seventy years of captivity—the full number the land would have enjoyed during the 490 years God's word was neglected. Like clockwork, the seventieth year, Cyrus, king of Persia, passed an edict declaring the Lord had appointed him to build a temple for him at Jerusalem. As God had used the sovereign of Egypt, Neco, so God would use another foreign sovereign to accomplish his purpose. God is sovereign over all of history and everyone in it. **Questions:** 1. How has the sovereignty of God over the events of my life been revealed? What circumstances in my life have most clearly revealed God's plan at work for me and through me? 2. What strange or surprising people or events has God used to help me know him better or serve better for him? 3. As when the temple was burned down and destroyed, what have been the darkest or most difficult times for me in my faith relationship with God? How did God restore my faith, as when God used Cyrus to rebuild the temple?

Corinthians: Called and sent. That's who I am in Jesus Christ, someone who is called and sent. Paul, called to be an apostle of Christ Jesus by the will of God, describes his mission: "Christ did not send me to baptize but to preach the cross of Christ, and that not with fine human flare, lest it be emptied of its power". The Christ-followers at Corinth are called, too. Called to be holy. Called by God into fellowship— into a true, intimate relationship of love—with God's Son, Jesus Christ. But even among those who are called and sent there will be troubles. There is division among those called by God in Corinth. It stems in part from the very calling they have received from God. When Paul tells them, 'You do not lack any spiritual gift,' he means that together, as a body, they have all the gifts from God needed to accomplish the mission on which they are sent. He does not say they each have all the gifts, or the same gifts, and implies there is a division of gifts that is only overcome as they live and work together. In part the divisions stem from the human instruments whom God used to extend the call to them: Apollos, Peter or Paul. The Corinthian Christ-followers are divided because they heard and heeded the call of God through different people. Paul appeals to them all to agree with one another, so there are no divisions among them and that they may be perfectly united in mind and thought, for the sake of the One who called them, and for the sake of the mission on which they are sent: to lift high the cross, so people can be called into fellowship with Christ, into life with God, just as they have been. The life transforming power is in the message of Christ, in the death of Christ on the cross for the forgiveness of sins, not in fine and flowery human words or wisdom. The proof of its truth is its power to transform lives, its power to call and send. **Questions:** 1. When and how did I first understand that I had personally been chosen (called) by God? When and how did I first realize that my call from God also meant that I am sent by God to accomplish his purposes through my daily living for God? 2. How is the fact that there were divisions in the early faith community give me comfort when I see troubles and divisions in my faith community today? How does the existence of divisions in my faith community today weaken the spreading of the Good News of Jesus Christ through us? What can I do to end divisions in my faith community? 3. How would I explain to someone I know the place and importance of the cross in my own life? In any person's coming to new life through faith in Jesus Christ?

Prayer: Called and sent! Oh, my God, how can it be, that you the Creator of the universe would care so much as to call me to you and send me forth on your mission to transform the world. You call changes me. Your inviting me into your intimate love changes everything. You give me purpose. You give my life a point. Forgive me when I raise up divisions with others who are called differently than I am. Through your Spirit, make me one in heart and mind with everyone you call and send, even in different ways. May your good news go out to everyone I know. Send me to them, I pray so your Son will be glorified and they will have new life with him...and me...forever. Amen.

Day 217. Read Ezra 1.1-2.70; 1 Corinthians 1.18-2.5;
Psalm 27.7-14; and Proverbs 20.22-23.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Ezra: A pagan king appointed to build a temple for God, by God? Incredible! What next?! King Cyrus issued an edict that anyone of God's chosen people, Israel, who had been carried into captivity in Babylon could return to Jerusalem to build a temple. It is a repeat of the Exodus—God's deliverance of Israel from slavery in Egypt—except that God never does the same deliverance twice. In the first Exodus the pagan king resisted with all his might, but now the pagan king encourages his servants to leave, to do a special service for God. King Cyrus even relinquishes all the holy vessels that had been taken as plunder when the first temple was destroyed. The leaders of Judah and Benjamin, the priests and temple workers, all prepared to go—everyone whose heart God had moved. How many did not go? Scripture does not say. But of those who did, the names and numbers were carefully written, a total of 42,360. 5,400 gold and silver vessels taken from the temple, including dishes, pans, bowls and miscellaneous items. Even the beasts of burden that carried the people and treasure back were numbers: 736 horses, 245 mules, 435 camels, 6,720 donkeys. So few, from the nation that had numbered in the millions? Yet, from this small number God would build not just a new temple but a new people for himself. When they arrived in Jerusalem, the first thing they did was to give a generous offering for the work, out of gratitude for God's deliverance. There is no temple at this point; yet, they are already worshipping God. They are already God's living temple as they give and worship. **Questions:** 1. Who are my 'Cyruses?' What surprising helpers or events has God put in my life to bring me to know him and follow him? How does God using them demonstrate his power and providence? 2. If I were to take inventory, what gifts, abilities and resources would be in my spiritual inventory with which to serve God? Though the list seems ever so limited and the need so great, how can my gifts, abilities, and resources be used by God to accomplish his purposes in my time and place through me? 3. How does my worship, giving out of gratitude, and using my gifts in completing God's purposes in the world make me a 'temple' of God today?

Corinthians: Complete foolishness! Utter folly and unforgivable weakness! That's what the cross is...to everyone who doesn't 'get it.' Everyone wants obvious confirmation. Some want miraculous signs—deeds of indisputable power—to prove it. Others want all their questions answered, setting themselves up as the final arbiter, so it must make sense to their own understanding. Instead, God gives them a crucified savior, which offends those who need signs of power and befuddles those who must understand. Dying in weakness for the weak? Paul himself came speaking not persuasive words of human wisdom, but the crucified Son of God; so that a faith might be formed that rests not on external signs or philosophies but on God's power to raise the dead. By befuddling the wise and powerful, God has opened up the way of life to everyone, including and especially, the lowest of all in the eyes of the world. The ones who think they get it don't, even though they could; but the very ones who know they won't get it will get it. And not only will they get it, they will know it is truly theirs!. What a God! **Questions:** 1. How can it be that, even though I don't understand it completely, I truly believe that Christ died and rose for me? 2. Why

do some people I know 'get it' (that is, believe in Jesus) while others I know don't? How can I help the ones who don't believe to come to a personal saving relationship with Jesus?

3. Why is it more important that I have a story to share about the Spirit's transforming power at work in my life, than that I know all the doctrine or be able to cite chapter and verse of scripture (both good things) when I talk with others about Jesus and the new life available through him? What would I tell someone I know about God's transforming power in my life?

Prayer: How foolish of you, God, to choose someone like me! But that is just like you. You chose the most foolish of saviors, to be my savior and save your world. Crucified? Why not a wonder worker? Wouldn't that have made it so much easier? Oh, right. He did that, too; but it didn't convince people finally, did it? Or how about sending a wise philosopher who taught the truth so plainly everyone could grasp it? Oh, right. He did that, too; but even then we wouldn't learn. It took the cross. To show our wisdom is foolishness. To show we don't know—can't do—what is right on our own. Very well, my loving Lord, crucified, crucify my wisdom. You are my wisdom. You weakness is my strength. Let faith rise up in me, even as my own wisdom and strength perish. Let me become as weak and as foolish as you. Only then will I be truly strong and wise. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 31

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): 2 Chronicles 33.1-6,10-13, 15-17
Psalm: 25. 4-15

Second (New Testament) Lesson: 1 Corinthians 1.18-29.

Theme: Breaking Up Is Hard To Do (Real Repentance, That Is)

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 31:

True repentance—which simply means 'turning' toward God, is like turning an aircraft carrier around, only harder. It takes time and effort; but more accurately, it takes supernatural power and eternity. Our own best efforts are the problem. They are what need to be broken up and broken down. We demand proof and explanation, proper and beneficial in themselves, because reason itself is a gift to us from God. But our own powers of mind and body cannot get us where we need to be. It takes supernatural power to transform us from self-centered beings to God centered people. It takes the cross that is foolishness to our human understanding, for we think we don't need radical remaking, just

a makeover. We believe we are basically good; and all we need is improvement, like fine tuning a fuzzy reception on our radios. Instead, what is needed is the supernatural power of God to recreate us; and God gives us this through the cross and resurrection of Christ. The cross checks our human wisdom and strength, and leads us to rely totally upon God in faith. God acts both to break down the barriers that keep us from God ('crosses' us) through the Law, and then lifts us up to new life when we have been 'broken' by circumstances ('resurrects' us with Christ) through the Gospel. Both God's checks (Law) and forgiving love (Gospel) are grace. King Manasseh of Israel received God's transforming love in both check and deliverance, turning from being one of Judah's worst to best kings in his spiritual leadership of the people. The same, transforming dynamic of cross and resurrection, of Law and Gospel, is God's way of working in everyone who comes to new life in Christ. The transformation continues all our lives, as God forms Christ in us.