

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 36

Day 246. Read Ecclesiastes 4.1-6.12; 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.7; Psalm 47.1-9; and Proverbs 22.16.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Ecclesiastes: He must have endured some very tough trials. Times that might have caused him to snap. Times that might have broken his spirit. 'The dead are happier than the living,' the writer of Ecclesiastes believed, 'and better than both is the one never born, who never knows the evil that occurs under the sun.' A glimmer of hope comes into his dark world when he says, 'Two are better than one.' In community, the burden is more easily borne. Two are more productive; for by working together, they have a good return for their labor. If one falls—physically, morally or spiritually - the other can lift them up again. Two will 'keep warm'—their physical needs are better fulfilled together. And when the enemy attacks, two can withstand the onslaught together, when alone they would succumb. 'A threefold cord is not easily broken,' the author says, drawing a parallel from everyday life. While each, separate strand would break under the strain, three strands entwined together in a single cord will bear a greater burden than even three could separately. Two are better than one. But three are better still...especially if the third in the relationship is God. Then those two can bear anything....even the onslaughts of the evil one himself.

Questions: 1. In those tough times in my life when I thought I would break, how did God provide strength and sustenance for me? Whom did he appoint to help me get through them? 2. How can I strengthen my relationships with God and godly people, so I can better withstand the onslaughts of the evil one and the difficulties of life in general? 3. Whom is God calling me to walk beside in their difficulties, to help them endure and prevail over them? What is one specific action I can take to help someone experiencing a difficult time right now?

Corinthians: The tractor of Biblical times: two oxen bound together by a wooden yoke. They pulled the plow. They uprooted trees or dragged away heavy stones. They pulled wagons bearing heavy loads, but only if the two pulled together. 'Do not be yoked together with unbelievers,' Paul bids Christ-followers. 'What does a believer have in common with an unbeliever?' he asks simply. It is like saying, 'what does daylight have to do with darkness?' for Paul. He doesn't say 'have nothing to do with them,' but only 'do not be yoked' with unbelievers' in an intimate relationship. The reason simply: you are heading

in a diametrically different direction than the rest of the world, if you follow Jesus. You are heading toward God. And what is more, you have already arrived at a different destination, if you believe in Christ. Already you are a temple of the living God, whose Spirit dwells within you now. God's people purify themselves and take part in no uncleanness, no act of darkness. Following Christ is the true counter-cultural life. As Paul will say elsewhere, we are to be 'in not of' the world. By blending in with the world, by becoming indistinguishable from the world, we simply lose our own redeemed identity, and we do the world no good whatsoever. We are not to be yoked with unbelievers; we are to help them discover and claim the yoke of Christ (Matthew 11.29-30). Accepting Christ's yoke means first breaking with the wants and ways of this world, but in the end it is easy and light; for it alone allows us to become who we can be in Christ: living temples of the living God, where everyone can meet and know God himself. **Questions:** 1. In what areas or relationships in my life am I still 'yoked' with the unbelieving world, in the sense of being deflected from following God or kept from becoming more Christ-like in my thoughts, words, and actions? 2. If I am a temple of the living God, as God's Word promises I am as a believer, what kind of temple am I? 3. What kind of temple would others who know me say I am? Would they even know I am a temple of the living God, or would they think 'God is dead' when they look at my words and actions?

Prayer: God, others have helped pull me away from you; and I have pulled others away from you myself. Truth is, they couldn't have pulled me away from you if I hadn't gone along. I allowed myself to become yoked with them and they with me. All that time and effort in life was wasted, like plowing the wrong field. But in an instant you forgave all that, when you called me to you in Christ. Your call invited me to turn around...empowered me to turn around. It is all by you. The call. The turning. And now I am your temple, a temple of yours, the living God. Live in me, live through me, be glorified in all my words and deeds; so others know your love for them, hear your call to them, and turn to you. You want more temples. You want every person to be your temple. That's why you made us in your image and likeness. Your good and gracious will be done! Amen.

Day 247. Read Ecclesiastes 7.1-9.18; 2 Corinthians 7.8-16; Psalm 48.1-14; and Proverbs 22.17-19.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Ecclesiastes: Looking in the mirror is invariably unsettling. Invariably we see sides of ourselves we would much rather overlook. Without blinking, the writer of Ecclesiastes took a long, steady look at the world...including the world within himself. He didn't much like what he saw. In this world, the race doesn't go to the fastest or the acclaim to the wisest. His physical eyes saw that here 'time and chance happen to all.' Worst of all, everyone shares the same destiny, good or bad, wise or foolish. All die. In the mirror of

this world, he observed himself, carefully, almost clinically, 'There is not a righteous person on earth who does what is right and never sins.' He includes himself among sinners. He saw much. But he didn't see all. At least he came to know what he didn't know. Searching all his life with all the human wisdom he could muster—which was as much as anyone can discover on his own—he discovered: No one can comprehend what goes on here under the sun or discover the meaning of life. Score one for the true seeker! He has come to the point where God can come in. He has come to the uttermost horizon of human limits, beyond which lies... God. **Questions:** 1. How do I deal with the fact that I really don't understand or comprehend life? 2. How do I live with the fact that the world is full of injustice? 3. How do I deal with the reality of my own sinfulness without either giving up in despair or giving in to complacency?

Corinthians: What kind of sorrow do you have? There are different types of sorrow. The worldly sorrow - despair - is one. The sorrow of despair leads us either to a mind-numbing complacency (giving up) or hyperactivity (continually chasing after something that forever eludes us). Godly sorrow leads in a different direction. In fact, it is a different direction. Godly sorrow brings repentance—which literally means 'turning.' It brings salvation—wholeness of life, joy-filled and free. Godly sorrow leaves no residue of regret. Worldly sorrow always brings regret for hurt or harm that happened and could have been prevented, or for opportunities to do good which were squandered. Might have been but was not. Ultimately, worldly sorrow brings death. In life, it brings a living death, life tinged with regret or longing for opportunity lost. Godly sorrow brings earnestness instead: energy with direction and hope. Repentance. Turning to God more and more. And God's promise is sure: draw near to him, and he will draw near to you. **Questions:** 1. What regrets gnaw at my peace of mind, heart, and spirit? How can I lay them before God, make amends if possible, lay them to rest, and move on in my relationship with God and with others? 2. Are there tendencies in my character or habitual ways of acting I need to turn away from ('repent of')? 3. Are there others I know who are laboring under a load of worldly sorrow, that need the good news that God will forgive them and free them? How can I help them come to know they can live life fully and freely through faith in Jesus Christ and the forgiveness and new life he has won for all who believe in him?

Prayer: God, you would surely be right to reject me. I have messed up so much and, especially, in the things that matter most. My relationship with you. My relationships with people who are precious to me....and you. Is there any way to get out from under that load of shame and regret? What? You do? For his sake? You forgive me because of his cross? Fully? Forever? I see. All right then, I will move on...and up...upward because of the new start you give me...new starts you give me again and again. Whew! It's great to be out from under that burden. I see some others still carrying theirs. If you'll excuse me, I think I'll go help them. Their burden doesn't look quite as big or bad as mine, but it's too big to bear alone. You come with me. Amen.

Day 248. Read Ecclesiastes 10.1-12.14; 2 Corinthians 8.1-15; Psalm 49.1-20; and Proverbs 22.20-21.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Ecclesiastes: The silver cord will one day be severed. The golden bowl shall be broken. One day. Before that day... remember. 'Remember your creator in the days of your youth,' the Teacher says. Remember him all the days of your life. What is the conclusion of the matter? What is the bottom line of life? 'Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of people.' Remember that God will judge everything that is done and every one. Nothing will be hidden. No one will be hidden. Remember God - 'before the silver cord is severed and the golden bowl is broken. Live life toward God...all of life. Questions: 1. When did I first come to the conscious awareness that there is a God? 2. When did I first start including God in my decisions and actions? 3. When did God become the center of them? Is God's will and way my primary consideration in life now?

Corinthians: Luther called it 'the wonderful exchange.' He was rich. His beloved was poor. He was perfect; his bride was fallen. He was powerful; we were weak—hopeless and helpless—except for him. Paul, persecutor and killer of Christians, proclaims the incredible truth: 'Though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor that through his poverty, you might become rich.' Christ exchanged heaven for hell. He traded his state for ours, so we might have his—his very nature and life. He took on our nature and our lot, so that we might be raised to his. The Christ-followers of Macedonia demonstrated the amazing impact and power of that wonderful exchange. Though extremely poor and under severe trails, they overflowed with a generous offering of money for people in need far away in Jerusalem. They showed forth his generous, giving nature, instead of our too common selfishness and self-centeredness. Now that's what I call 'trading up.' **Questions:** 1. How well do I reflect the 'riches' that have been given me by God through his Son, Jesus Christ, in my actions? Do I live life in as generous and giving way as I can, reflecting the new Christ-nature that is mine? 2. Do I reflect from time to time on what Jesus suffered in order that I might be freed of my spiritual poverty and be filled with the riches of God himself? How often do I meditate on his humble birth or his painful crucifixion and death? 3. Whom do I know who still needs to 'trade up'? Who still needs to receive the new nature and new life of Christ?

Prayer: My bankbook was empty, but that wasn't the whole story. Worse yet, I was so deeply in debt ten lifetimes wouldn't suffice to dig myself out, if that were even possible. He paid my debt. No, he filled my account full, with riches beyond imagining. Thank you, God, for the new nature that is mine as a gift—his nature—that now is mine. Such a loving, giving soul—that is true wealth, way beyond counting. Form his new nature in me completely. Make me loving...and giving...just like him. Then I shall be rich indeed. And let those riches, that are mine as your gift, overflow from me to all around

me. There are riches in him for all—more than enough for a world of people. I think I will give my riches away. Even if I could, I know you will only give me more Christ. I see your game...and will gladly play with you, my giving God. I will give him away, so you can give me more...and more...of Christ. Amen.

Day 249. Read Song of Songs 1.1-4.16; 2 Corinthians 8.16-24; Psalm 50.1-23; and Proverbs 22.22-23.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Song of Songs: God, my...lover? The idea takes your breath away. To be known and loved, intimately and personally, this is what we all long for, what each of us cries out for in a thousand, silent ways. We will search and seek for such love all our lives until we find it. The whole world has nothing to compare with it. The whole world instead tells us we are unloved...and unlovable. But this is not the truth. At the end of our search will come the discovery that our lover is...God...and we will stand trembling and breathless in the embrace of his love. This truly is the 'Song of Songs,' the music we long to hear. This is God's love song to his beloved: the human soul, and the faith community, his bride. "My lover is mine and I am his." Like King Solomon calling to his beloved, God calls to each human soul: 'Arise my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me.' He holds out his hand, inviting us into his embrace. How could any woman hope to be chosen to be the King's beloved? Yet, the King of the universe, God himself, desires the intimate love like that between husband and wife, between lovers, with us. 'I held him and would not let him go,' says his lover, when finally she finds him. Hold on to him and hear him say to you, 'You are all beautiful, my darling; there is no flaw in you. Come with me, my bride.' Questions: 1. How does it change the way I see myself and live my life to know that God longs for an intimate, personal relationship with me, with the same passion a lover longs for his beloved? 2. Why is it so hard for me to believe that? Because of my flaws? Because of the way the world views me as essentially inconsequential and worthless? Because of the sin and shame the evil one accuses me of? 3. Whom do I know who needs to know how much God loves and longs for them, so they can experience life as God's beloved?

Corinthians: Paul and Titus are appointed to carry the offering—the generous gift to help the people in need in Jerusalem. They take great pains to avoid any criticism in handling the gift, to do what is right, not only in the eyes of the Lord but also...and especially...in the eyes of people. The right things done in the right way, for the right motive. Show people the proof of your love. Not to earn God's favor or blessing...that has been freely bestowed in Christ already. Show people the proof; so they can catch that love, too. It is contagious. Paul caught it. And Titus. And the Corinthians. And...us? Questions: 1. Why is it important that Christ-like actions follow coming to faith in Christ? How am I doing? 2. What in my life needs to be done right now in the right way for the right reasons? Toward

whom do I need to demonstrate (and thereby prove) my love (which is Christ's love and new nature in me) right now?

Prayer: Lover of my soul, I cannot now love you as I ought. You must love for me. And I, as I am loved by you, will seek to love you with your own love in return...for mine is now nothing, compared to yours. Like some imperfect mirror, I will return your love and love you as I ought...as you love me...with all of heart, and mind, and soul, and strength. So you have loved me, my Beloved. Such love is too high for me, as I now am. You must love for both of us. And I will, like a window, let your love shine through me, out upon all around me. So your love will grow, as mine grows for you. Amen.

Day 250. Read Song of Songs 5.1-8.14; 2 Corinthians 9.1-15; Psalm 51.1-19; and Proverbs 22.24-25.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Song of Songs: "I slept, but my heart was awake." Quiet time together is a necessity for intimacy. 'Be still and know that I am God,' God said through the Psalm writer. 'Listen! My lover is knocking' sings the bride in the Song of Songs. In the stillness we can hear God, our Beloved, sing to us the same song of the Lover to his beloved in the Song of Songs: 'Open to me, my darling, my flawless one.' God pours his love into our hearts and souls at those precious times. But sometimes, even when we are constant in prayer, faithful in setting aside times for intimacy together with him, God may still withdraw from us, leaving us alone. 'I called for him but he did not answer,' Song of Songs says. John of the Cross called these times the dark night of the soul.' Those times, difficult as they are, are to stir us to increased longing and love for him; they do not indicate disregard or rejection. "His mouth is sweetness and he is altogether lovely," sings the bride about her beloved. He calls to her again: 'Come, beloved, let us go to the countryside and spend the night in the villages,' inviting her to renewed intimacy. Then his beloved bride says, 'Many waters—even rivers—cannot quench love.' God's love for us will never fail. He invites us to deeper and deeper intimacy with him, because he desires us for his own. **Questions:** 1. Do I really believe the God of the universe loves me personally, so much that he wants quiet times together? Do I really seek such times frequently, or do I allow my forgetfulness and busyness to crowd times for God out of my life? 2. How, when, and where can I set aside quiet times alone with God in my busy life? 3. When I pray and God seems distant, do I persist and seek him, believing as the Bible promises that he truly wants an intimate relationship with me? Do I tend to give up?

Corinthians: How do you want to live life? Close to the vest or fully open? Sowing few seeds...or as many as you can. The opportunity for people of faith is to give...and live...generously and cheerfully, because God we believe in and follow is a generous, cheerful giver. Paul knew that God. Paul promises God will give us everything we

need...and more! God not only provides the necessities but will give us an abundance, so that we will have more than enough to meet our needs and will abound in generosity for others. When we do, one of the deepest desires of our hearts for all those who love God will be satisfied: Paul promises, 'your generosity will result in greater thanksgiving to God,' as more and more people praise our generous, giving God. People will praise God for our obedience that accompanies our confession of the good news of God's love for all in the cross and resurrection of his Son for us. Thanks be to our generous, giving God for his indescribable gift! **Questions:** 1. What is the difference between my needs and my wants? How has God provided everything I need? 2. Am I generous and cheerful in my giving to God's work, my support of my faith community's life and mission? 3. Is the nature and way I give leading to more people knowing and praising God?

Prayer: God, you pour yourself out in love for me. Day by day, you provide all I need for life itself. But even more amazing, you came, Lord Jesus, and on your cross, crossed the deep divide between us—the chasm I created by my self-centeredness and selfishness, which kept us apart. You gave yourself for me, so that you might give yourself to me, in limitless love. I love you for loving me with such self-abandon. Teach me such love. Lead me to love...and live...with such self-abandonment, I pray. Teach me to give as you give...generously...gladly, even though it be a cross. Amen.

Day 251. Read Isaiah 1.1-2.22; 2 Corinthians 10.1-18; Psalm 52.1-9; and Proverbs 22.26-27.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Can there be any greater pain in a loving father or mother's heart than when a rebellious child runs away from home? How about when all the children run away, rebellious? 'I reared children and brought them up only to have them rebel against me,' says God. The ox and the donkey know their master and follow him, but not God's children. Yet, God's pain becomes even more severe when he sees his children suffering because of their rebellion, and yet refusing to turn back to him. 'Your whole head is injured, your whole heart tortured,' he says. To save them, he undertakes the severest action: 'When you pray, I will hide my eyes from you and will not listen.' He rejects all their religious acts while their rebellion persists. The problem? Their silver has become dross. They do injustice at every turn, failing to defend the cause of the fatherless and the widow. Yet, God will not give up on them. Though they are being destroyed by their own actions, he will preserve a remnant and renew their righteousness. The prophet is given a glorious vision of the restored people of God that extends salvation to all the nations: Many peoples will say, 'Let's go to the house of the Lord, and he will teach us his ways.' But first the Day of Lord must come, when the arrogance of rebellious humanity must be brought low, as all their self-made idols collapse; and God alone will be exalted. The prophet's message is plain: turn back to the Lord and do justice. The blessing God

intends, for all who do, is surely coming. **Questions:** 1. When I reflect over my past life, how much pain have I caused my loving Father through my rebelliousness and by hurting others of his children? How am I currently causing him pain through rebelliousness and hurting others? 2. How does it change my attitudes and actions to know that he loves me still, even though my waywardness deeply hurts him? 3. What relationships and areas of my life do I need to practice God's justice and love better, so that others may fare better and also be better attracted to God through my actions as a believer? What is one practical, next step I will take in one relationship or area?

Corinthians: Move over, mighty warriors of the world! The smallest, most insignificant person who believes in God and follows Christ has power beyond your imagining. The least in the kingdom of God has power beyond any power of yours! Our weapons are not of this world, which can only affect temporary things that are passing away anyway. Our weapons have divine power to demolish spiritual strongholds against God. We demolish arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the saving knowledge of God. The weapons of the world may take people captive for a time. We take captive every thought we have to make it obedient to Christ, and thereby set the bearer free. Worldly weapons destroy, but the spiritual weapons of faith build up. They bring death, but these bring life. The way to life, the way to be free, is to demolish every argument, stop hiding behind pretense, and take every thought captive, to follow and obey Christ. **Questions:** 1. What arguments and pretenses are still raging in me? 2. What thoughts do I need to take captive to make them obedient to Christ, so my mind belongs to him totally?

Prayer: God, unless you conquer me, I will never be free. Unless you take me captive totally, I will never become who I can be in Christ. Break down every barrier, tear down every wall of pretense or argument I build. Holy Spirit, dwelling in me, by your power enable me to take my every thought captive to follow Jesus Christ. In the morning when I awake, let your Son rise before my opening eyes. At the noonday, let Jesus direct my words and deeds. And when the shadows fall about me, let Jesus Christ lighten my darkness and make sure my steps. Take me captive to your will and way, so I breathe justice and mercy, even as you do. Make me become more and more who I will be finally and fully on the last day when I will see you face to face, the One whom I love and long for. Amen.

Day 252. Read Isaiah 3.1-5.30; 2 Corinthians 11.1-15; Psalm 53.1-6; and Proverbs 22.28-29.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: It's hot, hard work making a vineyard. Clearing the hillside. Digging places to plant the vines. Clearing away the stones. Making a watchtower to protect it. Cutting a winepress out of the solid rock. After all that work, the owner might expect a good crop.

Instead, God got only bad fruit. ‘What more could be done for my vineyard—my people—than what I have done for it?’ God asks with disbelief and sorrow. What do you do with such a vineyard that produces only bad fruit? Take down its protective hedge, break down its protective wall, and let it face the consequences. Command the clouds to withhold the rain. Let the briars and brambles grow there, since these are just like the bad fruit they are producing. The vineyard was God’s people. People are the garden of his delight. God did everything possible for them. He looked for them to produce justice and mercy, instead he got bloodshed. God lifts up a banner signaling distant nations, and calls to people at the ends of the earth to come and bring the destruction deserved. Like a storm looming in the distance, that sends rumbles of thunder ahead as a warning, so Isaiah the prophet says again and again, ‘In that day...’ The day of judgment is coming. Questions: 1. What blessings and gifts has God given me personally in my life? 2. How have I used these gifts to benefit others? How have I failed to bear the fruit of justice and mercy from the blessings God has given me? 2. What difficulties in life have come about for me because of my own wrongdoing or neglect of others’ needs? Have these served to drive me outward from myself, closer to God, and outward in service to others?

Corinthians: There are false apostles, as well as true. Knowing the difference is critical to life itself. ‘I promised you to one husband, to Christ,’ Paul tells the Corinthians. Someone has been trying to lead them into adultery. He has led them to sincere and pure devotion to Jesus Christ; but, when someone else comes—‘super apostles’ who seem so spectacular—and preaches a Jesus other than the Jesus Paul preached, they put up with it easily enough. Didn’t they know the real Jesus? Did they think Jesus changed? Did they think about it at all, or were they just dazzled by the displays of the super-apostles? How can the difference between a real apostle and an imposter be known? In Paul’s case, one crucial point is plain: Paul was not a financial burden to anyone. ‘I robbed (he actually says robbed!) other churches by letting them support his need rather than take anything from the Corinthians themselves. The picture implied is of churches choosing to support sending workers they know to be true to start other churches, as their response to God’s goodness in giving them salvation through the gospel of Jesus Christ. The other way to know the difference is to know the gospel itself—that everyone who believes is saved by grace through faith in Jesus Christ alone, not by works, but for works, as he says elsewhere. This is the Jesus Paul proclaimed. This is the Jesus the Corinthians are in danger of abandoning for the false apostles’ mirages. No wonder there are false apostles. Satan, who began life as a glorious archangel himself, still masquerades as an angel of light. No surprise, then, that those blinded by him masquerade as servants of righteousness. Know the difference. Know the gospel. Know the real Jesus Christ. **Questions:** 1. Who have been my best teachers and mentors in helping me have a real relationship with the true Jesus Christ? 2. What influences have been bad on my faith life, confusing me or deflecting from following Jesus as his disciple? 3. How can I better know Jesus and the good news about him in the Bible, so I am not so much at the mercy of others or at risk from being led astray?

Prayer: God, all the work you have spent and with so little return! What fruit have I returned to you, for all you have done for me? Not enough. Not good fruit, compared to your many good labors you have showered on me. Too often my fruit is bitter. Too often it is spoiled. Too often dry. But the fruit of the cross, so bitter for you, bears better hope for me and all who bear bitter fruit ourselves. Graft me into you wholly, my branch into your vine, that I may bear holy fruit for you. May all my words and deeds, reflecting Christ, be a sweet taste in your mouth, and bring joy to your heart. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 36

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Ecclesiastes 4.8-12

Psalm: 53.1-6

Second (New Testament) Lesson: 2 Corinthians 6.14-7.1

Theme: The Yoke Is On You! (But Which One?)

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 36:

Loneliness is epidemic in the world. Like some dread disease, the fear and desperation it creates wreaks havoc among people, destroying individuals, marriages, families, and whole communities. We are created intentionally by God in his image and likeness as relational beings, who can only experience the fullness of life through love. The writer of Ecclesiastes shows the case of a man who toils and labors without any significant relationship, wondering, 'what is the point?' Two are better than one, the author concludes, and enumerates the reasons: they produce more, they withstand threats better, their physical and emotional needs are supplied better, and they bear up under the pressures of life, better than does a person alone. Is it any wonder that people seek relationships? But sadly, not all relationships are healthy and wholesome for us. Paul, writing to the Corinthians, urges them not to be 'yoked together with unbelievers.' Speaking primarily to the most intimate and far-reaching of human relationships, the marriage between a man and a woman, he urges Christians to seek life partners who share the same spiritual walk with Christ. Christ-followers need to be very careful to distinguish that while Paul urges followers of Jesus not to be 'yoked' with unbelievers, he is not telling believers to have no relationships with unbelievers. Elsewhere he writes we are to be 'in but not of the world. As Jesus said, his followers are to be like salt or yeast in their relationships—influencing others through their loving, Christ-like words and servant deeds to follow Jesus, not to isolate themselves or have nothing to do with them. Jesus himself was known as 'the friend of sinners,' a negative label hung on him by his opponents, but one which he accepted joyfully. The crucial distinction is not to be 'yoked' to them, which

means not to be consenting and following their path, but lovingly influencing them toward and for Jesus Christ. This is done by coming alongside them in their lives, particularly in the challenges they face.