

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 37

Day 253. Isaiah 6.1-7.25; 2 Corinthians 11.16-33;
Psalm 54.1-7; and Proverbs 23.1-3.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: How shall the Holy God welcome unholy people into his presence? This is God's dilemma, for his love drives him to seek the people he has created for relationship with him, yet his perfect holiness means he can brook not the least imperfection or moral failing. Isaiah, one of a thousand priests who had served in the temple where the incessant animal sacrifices were offered for sin, is brought suddenly through a vision into the very presence of the Holy God. His response is immediate: "I am lost!" A sense of concrete sin overwhelms him. This is not some vague or general sense of contamination, but related to him personally and to a certain sin specifically: "I am a man of *unclean lips*, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips." How shall he, in his particular being with his particular sin, stand in the presence of God and live? God must act. God takes the initiative. From the altar God sends an angelic messenger with a burning coal to touch his lips. Only the cleansing fire from heaven—only God's white hot love that seeks and saves sinners—can remove sin and restore to right relationship with God. 'Your guilt is taken away,' God's go-between declares, 'and all your sin is atoned for.' That main work being accomplished, God now asks all who are listening: 'Who will undertake my mission? Who will go for me to do my work?' The call is addressed to anyone...to everyone. God simply asks...he compels no one...and waits to see who chooses to respond. Forgiven and freed from his burden of guilt and sin, Isaiah responds 'Send me!' He knows now he dare not go on his own, as he has so often before. Now he awaits the commission of God. When it comes, he leaps to obey it. He carries messages even to kings. To one he carries a promise of a strange sign from God: 'A virgin will conceive and bear a son and will call him Immanuel—God with us.' God himself will come and dwell among sinners so that sinners might dwell with him. And the perfect sign of this perfect love is...a helpless human baby...a man dying on a cross...Immanuel. **Questions:** 1. Have I ever really experienced the gift of true awareness of my sin, sorrow and repentance like Isaiah? Or do I really, deep down, feel that basically I am an 'okay' person who really deserves God favor? 2. Do I really appreciate the cost God paid in sending his Son from heaven to die for me to take away my sins, so I can finally be freed to stand before God in Christ's righteousness? Is

Jesus Christ really Immanuel for me personally, 'God with us?' 3. Have I gone the next step after being saved (forgiven of sins) to accept the call of God to enter into his service and mission? To whom is God sending me with his word of forgiveness and new life in Christ?

Corinthians: Who deserves to carry the banner for Christ? What kinds of qualifications make a person fit for the task? Paul is tempted to respond in worldly ways. He could boast of his work ethic. He has worked harder than all the 'super-apostles' that are criticizing him. He could enumerate his labors...and sufferings...in God's work. He has been imprisoned more...beaten more...and beaten more severely. Five times he has been flogged, three times beaten with rods, stoned once. He was shipwrecked and spent a day and...worse...a night adrift on the sea. He was constantly moving and constantly in danger from bandits, from foreigners, and even from false 'Christians.' He bore daily the burden of the concerns of all the churches he had helped found or had strengthened with his ministry with them. That list would fill a resume. It would comprise a highly respectable autobiography...a best seller...today. Surely all that qualified him to carry the banner of Christ! Yet Paul says, 'If I must boast, I will boast instead of the things that show my weaknesses.' People must come to know Christ and his strength, not distracted to look at the message bearers boasting. The point is not who is qualified to carry the banner of Christ, but who will be the banner, and by lifting up their own weaknesses lift up Christ and his strength. **Questions:** 1. Do I really perceive my weaknesses and failings as assets in helping to lift up Christ? How do they, if I make them available to others at appropriate time and in appropriate ways, become avenues for Christ reaching others? 2. What are my main weaknesses and shortcomings? How has Christ conquered them? 3. Who do I know who is struggling and needs one person struggling like them—me—to walk with them and show them Christ's love?

Prayer: God, there are still so many mysteries that surround you. I still can't fathom what a God like you—holy and perfect in every way—could have anything to do with someone as saturated with sin as me...or why you would even want to. That is the mystery of the baby born in Bethlehem...and the man dying on the center cross between two thieves...on my cross. And even though I have accepted your gift of salvation, I still sin against you, and you still accept me! Such ways are far too deep for me. But this I know. I thank you. I love you. I will follow you forever. And I give back to you what is mine....even my weaknesses. Make use of them, loving Lord, to help someone struggling as I am. Lead me to the very ones who are feeling they are beyond your love, and let me show them in my own life how they cannot possibly be beyond your love since I am not. Amen.

Day 254. Isaiah 8.1-9.21; 2 Corinthians 12.1-10;
Psalm 55.1-21; and Proverbs 23.4-5.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: God's prophecies roll down through Isaiah one after another like thunder during a summer rain storm. Still, the people of Israel are searching in their own wandering ways for guidance. They consult mediums and spiritualists, who mumble incantations and arrange séances to talk with the dead. Why consult the dead on behalf of the living? Why not consult God. 'Go to the law and the testimony' God declares. If it is not according to this Word, they have no guidance to give. Their light is darkness. And still God's prophecies continue to roll down one after another through his prophets like thunder during a summer rain storm. The prophecies sound forth strange tidings that will strain...and break in many cases...the imagination of the people to understand what God is doing. A Stone who will cause men to stumble is coming, a rock that will make them fall. In Galilee of the Gentiles—the land of foreigners far from God—people will see a great light. To us a child will be born who will be called Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. He will reign on David's throne forever. Why consult the dead about the living. Consult the Living God and trust in his Word. **Questions:** 1. Do I place inordinate trust in the 'wisdom' of people and base my daily decisions and actions on their conventional human 'wisdom' too much? How much do I just go along with the flow of my surrounding secular culture and community? 2. Do I eagerly seek my guidance and wisdom to act from God's Word? 3. How can I get into closer touch with God through his Word?

Corinthians: Would you rather have a throne or a thorn? Paul had experienced inexpressible things of the spirit. He heard inexpressible things when he was caught up—whether in body or spirit, he could not tell—into paradise. But he would not boast in these things. More precious to him than the Throne was a thorn. To keep him from being to elated...too elevated to be of any earthly use...a thorn in the flesh was 'given' him. What this gift thorn was, he doesn't say, just as he doesn't say what he heard or experienced when he was caught up to the Throne. It was something so painful or so humiliating or so galling that he prayed fervently and persistently that God would remove it. And the All Loving, All Wise God responded to Paul's persistent pleading: 'No.' Actually, he didn't say no, he said 'You already have what you need. My grace is sufficient for you. My strength is perfected in your weakness, not by removing your weakness and making you self-sufficient.' And so Paul would boast only of his weaknesses. Paul discovered delight in his weaknesses... and his hardships... and even the insults and persecutions the came from following Christ. When he was weak, then Christ was strong. Paul chose the thorn over the throne. **Questions:** 1. What is the most wonderful moment of the spirit God has yet given me? Was there in me some tendency to want to hold on to that moment and linger in the memory of that moment instead of following God through every moment in the now? 2. What are my persistent weaknesses? Have I prayed persistently for God to remove them, and worked to uproot them, or have I just simply compromised and given in to them? What is the difference between in Paul's example between praying persistently and just giving up and giving in? 3. How Is God's strength being perfected in my weakness? Is

there any sense in which I actually delight in my weaknesses, sufferings and persecutions for Christ's sake?

Prayer: Really, Lord, is there any danger at all of me becoming too elated? Is there really any danger of me being too joyful and spiritual as to be of any good to anyone? I feel that I am surrounded and immersed in weaknesses. Oh, I try to prop my Self up and put on appearances of being in control...of being elated all the time. I put on a happy face. Do you really want me to have weaknesses? Wouldn't you love me more if I were without weaknesses...if I were strong and...perfect? I would love me more. But there it is. You wouldn't love me more. You couldn't love me more than you do right now, weaknesses and all. And I suppose I wouldn't really love myself more if I were perfect now, because I wouldn't need you as much...wouldn't need you at all. That would be a worse weakness even than the weaknesses I now have. I don't think I can go as far as Paul yet, Lord, and say I delight in my weakness, my sufferings, my persecutions for following you. I am too weak yet to do so. But Lord, if you will it, then it will be my will. Bring them on...and help me bear them with you as my Strength. Amen.

Day 255. Isaiah 10.1-11.16; 2 Corinthians 12.11-21; Psalm 56.1-13; and Proverbs 23.6-8.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: 'Does the axe consider itself above the one who wields it, or the saw above the one who uses it?' asks God through his prophet Isaiah. Assyria, God's instrument to discipline Israel to come back to the Lord, does. Assyria's purpose is to destroy many nations—to annihilate them, which means literally 'to make as nothing' as the word annihilate signifies. Assyria is bent on destruction, not discipline. God's purposes are different ultimately. The axe of Assyria will indeed fall on Israel and Israel will fall like a mighty tree. But out of the stump, the Branch will rise. On this one the Spirit of wisdom, counsel, might, the knowledge and fear of the Lord will rest. With justice he will decide for the poor of the earth. Under his rule the wolf will live with the lamb. Under him, the whole earth will be filled with those who know the Lord, as the waters cover the sea. In his promised day, God declares, the Branch will stand as a banner for the exiles of Israel and for all peoples, and the nations will rally to him...people of all nations...even people of Assyria. God's call...and mercy...extends to all. **Questions:** 1. When I am angry with someone, how am I like the Assyrians in wishing only harm on them? 2. Who do I tend to be angry with right now, whose good I am not really interested in or acting to effect because of my anger? What is God teaching me by raising up Christ as a banner to draw all people to him? 3. Toward whom do I need to put aside my own reluctance or righteous indignation to reach out to them in love and help draw them closer to Christ?

Corinthians: Paul wants not what the false ‘super-apostles’ want but what God wants: they themselves. He wants not the Corinthians’ possessions but the people, the Corinthians Christ-followers themselves. Like a loving parent, who doesn’t seek to get any benefit from his or her children but wants to impart benefit to them, Paul wants nothing from the Corinthians but their loving obedience. He wants them... the whole person and all the people...lock, stock and barrel. Like a loving parent, Paul will gladly spend everything he has for them and even expend himself for them. He is afraid that when he comes to them again, like a loving parent visiting his children, he will find them not as he wants them to be...and they will therefore find him not as they want him to be...a kind, loving parent. He fears that there may be [in fact he found that there was] quarreling, jealousies, angry outbursts, gossip, slander and more. He wants to come to them in love, and he will come to them in love, doing what is necessary truly to benefit them, even if it risks their loving in return. A mother does that for her children. A Christ-follower does that for everyone. **Questions:** 1. Do I tend to use others for my own benefit, rather than put their benefit ahead of my own? 2. In reaching others for Christ, do I select people on the basis of what they can do for my faith community, or just reach out to people who would benefit from being a part of Christ’s community regardless of what they may or may not be able to contribute? 3. Whom do I need to revisit to seek their benefit through helping them to a deeper relationship with Christ? What is my next step in reaching out to them?

Prayer: God, I am just your instrument. Help me to remember that. All judgment belongs to you alone. Use me when you will, with whomever you will, in any way you will. Use me to serve and reach the people around without any thought of my own benefit, for if I seek my own benefit, I will be of no benefit to you or anyone, not even myself. You have already given me all the blessings I will ever need anyway. You did so when you gave me yourself. Amen.

Day 256. Isaiah 12.1-14.32; 2 Corinthians 13.1-14;
Psalm 57.1-11; and Proverbs 23.9-11.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: ‘I will punish the whole world for its evil, all the wicked for their sins’ God declares through his prophet Isaiah. He promises to put an end to the arrogance of the haughty and humble the pride of the ruthless. Mighty nations will fall, including Babylon, the world power by which God chastised his people Israel. Of the king of Babylon people will ask ‘Is this the one who shook the earth, the man who made the earth a desert, who took captives he would never release to go home again? Babylon itself will become a desert-place for owls to dwell—and will be swept into the ashbin of history. In ‘that day,’ in the day when God fulfills his promise, releases the captives, and saves his people, they will praise God and say ‘Surely God has become my salvation, my strength and my song. I will

trust and not be afraid.’ Like people thirsty from wandering lost in the desert, they will draw water from the wells of salvation...and drink deeply of the love of God that delivered them from all that oppressed them. Praise springs from redemption. Deliverance came. God fulfilled his Word. The promise of deliverance is ours now, too, like a cup of cold water on a thirsty, desert day. **Questions:** 1. How does the reality of my total deliverance in Christ’s cross and resurrection change the way I face my ‘desert days’ as I await my final deliverance? 2. How do I show in my actions in life that God is ‘my strength?’ 3. What does it mean to say ‘God is my song?’ Does my life reflect the joy and hope that knowing God has redeemed me enkindles? Do my actions show the courage, confidence and joy of the Lord? How?

Corinthians: Some in Corinth were demanding Paul demonstrate in deeds of power that Christ was working through Paul. ‘All right,’ Paul demurs, ‘we will see.’ Paul will make yet a third visit to Corinth, this time not sparing those who sinned earlier, since some are demanding proof that Christ is speaking through Paul. To be sure, Christ was crucified in weakness, but now Christ lives by God’s power. Just so, Paul came in weakness, yet lives by God’s power to serve them. In fact, Paul is glad whenever he is weak as long as they are truly strong... in Christ. His prayer, fervent and repeated, is for their perfection. This striving for perfection in Christ is so critical, Paul repeats it directly as a command to ‘Aim for perfection.’ Above, and before, and beyond all, Paul concludes with a blessing: may the grace of the Lord Jesus, the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Spirit be with you all! May the Holy God—Father, Son, and Holy Spirit—lead you on the journey! **Questions:** 1. Am I compromising comfortably in my life in Christ, or still striving for perfection in Christ-like character and actions? 2. In what areas of my character do I still need to grow more Christ-like? 3. Who can be my spiritual ally and guide, as Paul was for the Corinthians, to help me strive for perfection and grow more Christ-like?

Prayer: Perfection? That is you, Lord, not me. You are every perfection, and all perfection, Lord. You call me to your perfect love, and your perfect love will one day work its perfect magic and make me perfectly to be like your Son, Jesus. Lord, let me never rest complacent until that day. Let me keep Christ before my eyes, on my lips, and in my heart until the transforming work of your Spirit is complete, even though that means the death of my self. Only through that death will I finally be alive. Amen.

Day 257. Isaiah 15.1-18.7; Galatians 1.1-24;
Psalm 58.1-11; and Proverbs 23.12.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: ‘My heart cries out over Moab’ God declares, ‘my heart laments for Moab like a harp...my inmost being grieves.’ This enemy of God’s people, sometimes the instrument of God’s correction of his people, will itself be destroyed soon. And God grieves. Yet God

does not relent. God does not let up. 'I will bring still more upon them' God declares. The cleansing—the surgical—process must continue until it is complete and the healing can come. In that day, the day of Moab's destruction, the glory of God's people will fade. Yet, gleanings will remain, as when two or three olives remain on the highest branch of the tree. 'In that day' God declares, 'people will again turn to their Maker and turn their eyes to the Holy God.' God's purpose will be complete...the surgery successful. They will no longer look to the work of their own hands for their security, nor seek it from false the false gods that abound in this world. This is God's promise, and it is not for Israel alone. All the people of the world, all who live on the face of the earth, when God's banner is lifted up, all will see it, and when his herald sounds the trumpet call, all will hear it. **Questions:** 1. How has God worked in my life to effect his surgery? How has God worked through tough situations or confronting me with my failings to bring me to the point where he can transform me? 2. What situations in my life have turned me from trusting in the work of my own hands and turned me toward my Maker, the Holy One? 3. How is Christ's being lifted up on the cross like God's raising a banner to catch my attention, or sounding a trumpet to get me to turn to him? How is Christ's cross a call to everyone I know?

Galatians: A different gospel? In one sense there is no other gospel, and in another, there are almost an infinite number of 'gospels' in this world. Many things claim for ultimacy in our lives. Many things promise us—but can't deliver—security and well-being. So Paul tells the erstwhile followers of Christ at Galatia, it was because of the very fact that we are tempted by false 'gospels,' that Christ 'gave himself for our sins to rescue and redeem us 'from the present evil age'—which is the only true Gospel. Why is Paul so surprised, then, that they are falling away from that true Gospel? It is not that they are falling away, but how quickly they have fallen away. The incredible Gospel of salvation as a gift through faith in Christ is so amazing, so astounding, how could they ever fall away, let alone so quickly? The Gospel is not anything any human made up. Nor did Paul receive it from another human being. He received it by Christ's revealing it to him in person. What else could explain the change in Paul's life? How could he turn from a persecutor of Christ to a proclaimer of Christ? How could he who killed followers of Christ be the one who birthed more Christ-followers than anyone of his time...or afterwards? When the Gospel exploded in his life, the old person was killed and a new person arose to live in a totally opposite direction. How could anyone fall from this Gospel? Why would anyone want to? **Questions:** 1. What 'other gospels' are current in my world today? What things, faiths, or people other than Christ offer me and people security and well-being? 2. When in my life have I been tempted to follow ...or even succumbed to follow...these 'other gospels?' 3. Who do I know now among my family members, friends, neighbors or fellow workers who are following another gospel? How can (and will) I help them to know the true Gospel?

Prayer: God, you know I have tried other gods. I've gone after other gospels. In fact, I still hesitate and turn to them sometimes. I stumble and seek to secure myself through other means than you have provided, other ways that seem to promise me more and demand less of me than your way does. Your free Gospel sets me free, but freedom with you seems scary and more demanding than most 'other gospels' I see around me...on the

surface, anyway. I know they are ‘too good to be true,’ because ultimately they are just not true. They don’t free, they bind. They don’t relieve, they burden. They don’t redeem, they drive down deeper into failure and shame. The cross of Christ and his empty tomb are the only Gospel. Lord, make my life proclaim your Gospel—the forgiving, freeing love of Christ—to everyone around me, so joyfully and lovingly that your Gospel is heard high above the clamor of the false gospels flying about everywhere today. Amen.

Day 258. Isaiah 19.1-21.17; Galatians 2.1-16;
Psalm 59.1-17; and Proverbs 23.13-14.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: It seems on the surface like ‘deja vu all over again.’ The prophet Isaiah, as Moses long before him declares ‘The Lord will strike Egypt with a plague.’ God never does anything the same twice. When God’s people were enslaved in Egypt, God struck them with plagues to convince them to release them from slavery. Ten plagues, each more severe than the preceding, in an ascending stair of destruction, to convince them to change. Now God proclaims he will again strike Egypt with a plague, for a different purpose. He will strike them...and heal them. He will strike them, and they will turn to the Lord, and the Lord will respond to their pleas, and heal them! The Lord will make himself known to the Egyptians, those who worshipped other gods and took pride in their ancient wisdom, and in that day they will acknowledge the Lord as God. But wait...there is yet more astounding news. There will be a highway between two ancient enemies, Egypt and Assyria.. Egypt and the Assyrians—those ancient enemies of one another, and of Israel—will worship the Lord together...and Israel will be the third! God will bless them saying ‘Blessed be Egypt, my people, and Assyria my handiwork, and Israel, my chosen inheritance.’ In one breath of God—one blessing—those who were divided will be united in worshipping him. This amazing God transforms enemies into friends. **Questions:** 1. Who are on my enemies list right now? With whom am I at odds? 2. Will I pray God’s blessing on them? And mean it? 3. What can be done to demonstrate God’s blessings towards them? What is my next step?

Galatians: Afraid that he might be running his race in vain, or had run his course in vain, Paul went up to Jerusalem and set before those who were leaders the Gospel that he preached among the Gentiles. Some false brothers were trying to overturn the freedom believers have in Christ and make them into slaves of the Law again. Paul did not give in one moment so that the truth of the Gospel that people are saved by grace through faith alone might not be compromised for the Gentile believers. Even James, the brother of Jesus, Peter, and John gave Paul their right hands—the sign of fellowship—when they recognized the grace of God upon Paul’s message and ministry. Later Paul even took Peter himself to task when he acted duplicitously. When Jewish Christians came from James to

Peter in Antioch, Peter withdrew from the Gentile believers and would have nothing to do with them because he feared those who insisted that Gentiles be circumcised and follow the Law. Peter's misstep made others go astray as well, including even for a time Barnabas, Paul's close compatriot and missionary partner. 'We know that a person is not set right with God by observing the Law,' Paul challenged Peter, 'but only by faith in Jesus Christ.' Paul was not running in vain. He had not—and never did—wander off course. He called others to the true course, the Gospel of salvation by grace through faith alone. **Questions:** 1. When and how have I ever compromised the Gospel, the critical message of salvation by grace through faith alone available to everyone who believes in Jesus Christ? 2. When and how have I ever caused others to stumble in coming to Christ or following Christ because of my own missteps or bad example? Are there ways I am doing that now? 3. To whom do I make myself accountable in the faith so that I know I am going right in my message and actions, just as Paul made himself accountable to the leaders in Jerusalem? If I don't have that spiritual accountability relationship yet, whom can I ask to assume that role?

Prayer: By grace alone. Through faith alone. Lord, let me never lose sight of your glorious Gospel. Let me never compromise it or lead others astray onto the treadmill of endlessly trying to earn or deserve what can be received only as a gift. Let me surround myself with your mature followers who will hold me accountable and keep me on course. Help them help me keep living grace and faith alone, so everyone around me sees and hears your Gospel in my actions, not only my words. Amen.

Day 259. Isaiah 22.1-24.23; Galatians 2.17-3.9;
Psalm 60.1-12; and Proverbs 23.15-16.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Why would God, who created the earth and everyone in it, want to lay it waste? 'See, the Lord is going to lay waste to the world and devastate it,' Isaiah declares for God, adding as the punctuation a final period: 'The Lord has spoken.' It is straight from the Lord's mouth. This earth will one day be completely laid waste and destroyed. Everyone left alive on it will experience it. Priest and people. Master and servant. Seller and buyer. Borrower and lender. Everyone. No one will escape. 'Whoever flees at the sound of terror will fall into a pit, and whoever climbs out of the pit will be caught in a snare.' Not one person will escape. When? This is a prophecy of the Judgment Day. 'In *that day* God declares through his prophet Isaiah, 'The Lord will punish the powers in the heavens above (the evil powers, symbolized by the sun god and moon goddess) and the kings on the earth below. Isaiah is the prophet who foresees (and foretells) a new heaven and a new earth where wolf and lamb lie down together. This too is God's doing. But first this old heaven and old earth must be destroyed. And then 'the Lord God will reign.' Before the new creation comes the Judgment Day for the whole earth and everyone on it. **Questions:** 1. How should I live my life now in light of the Judgment Day that is surely coming? 2.

How should I relate to the people and things of this earth, seeing that every thing in this world will one day pass away, with only people being eternal? 3. Who do I know who needs to know and believe in Jesus Christ so they can stand in the Judgment? What is my next step to share Christ's love and message with them?

Galatians: What way do you want to live your life? There are many ways to chose from. Fear and foreboding. Boredom and idleness. Obsession and compulsion. How about joy and love? Hope and expectancy? Courage and confidence? 'This life I live in this body, I live by faith in God's Son who loved me so much he gave himself for me' Paul says. He can't imagine anyone wanting anything else once they have heard and believed the message of Christ's cross and resurrection for us. He thinks the foolish Galatians bewitched when they quickly fall away. After beginning with the Spirit who gives life, why would they want to return to trying to eke out life from the lifeless Law? After experiencing the power of the Spirit and the miraculous power of God through faith, why would they 'trade down' again by returning to endless rules and rituals? Abraham, the father of faith, knew better. 'Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him as righteousness.' Why return to trying to pay off an un-payable debt when the whole riches of God are available as a gift through faith in Christ. What way do you want to live your life? They choice is up to you...to everyone individually. Paul decided 'I have been crucified with Christ, so it is no long I who live, but Christ who lives in me.' He chose to live by faith. Now that's truly 'trading up.' Way, way up. **Questions:** 1. Why do I still tend to try to assure my salvation with God by being and doing good out of the desire to prove something? Why don't I totally and continually trust that I am already forgiven and save because of Christ's cross, and so live just out of faith, freedom, gratitude and joy? 2. What does it mean for me personally to say with Paul that it is no longer I who live but Christ who lives in me? If Christ is living in me, how much and how often? ___Always & totally ___Most often and mostly ___ Sometimes and somewhat ___ Seldom and little ___ Never and no how. 3. Whom do I know who is still following Christ out of compulsion and fear, rather than love and joy? How can I show them the free unhindered love of Christ in action so they might experience and find the full freedom of faith?

Prayer: Christ, live in me. I don't want to live any more, because truthfully, I haven't been doing such a great job of living myself. I am certain you will do a better job than I have, so you take the muddle I have made of my life and transform it to be your own. My selfish self was crucified on your cross, yet that insidious 'I-me-mine' still struggles within me to survive and ascend to take back your rightful throne. All power is yours and yours alone. Don't just live in me, rule in me. Reign supreme over every bit of my being, every thought, word and act. Your kingdom come...to me... and through me. I trust you totally, you alone. I am yours. Let it be no longer 'I' who live, but you who live in me...and through me. Now that will be truly living. That is the Life I want...your life...for you are the Way, the Truth and the Life. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 37

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Isaiah 6.1-8

Psalm: 57.1-11

Second (New Testament) Lesson: 2 Corinthians 12.2-10

Theme: Our Limitations Provide God's Opportunity

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 37:

What do we do with our weaknesses? Most often we hide them and assume masks, seeking to appear stronger than we are, which actually makes us weaker still, as insecurity and shame gnaw away at our souls. Instead of embracing our weakness, we wish we could live without weakness, on a continual high. The Bible passages chosen talk about two people who were given amazing spiritual experiences: Isaiah, the Old Testament prophet, was given a vision of heaven, while Paul was caught up into heaven, either through a vision or in the body, he could not say which afterward. A danger in such experience is that we might come to desire these delicious gift-experiences for themselves, and lose sight of the most important gift of all: God himself. But a mark of the genuineness of these spiritual experiences is that they ground us all the more firmly in the reality of true self knowledge: we are always totally dependent on God for everything. Isaiah immediately declares not 'how great I am' for receiving such an experience but 'how great Thou art' to God. 'Woe is me' he says, "for I am a man of unclean lips and dwell among a people of unclean lips.' His sense of his sinfulness grounds him solidly in God's forgiving grace and the greatness of God's love. An angel is sent from the altar with a fiery coal that forgives his sin when it touches his lips. Paul is grounded in humility because of a 'thorn in the flesh' which he cannot remove and prays persistently for God to remove for him. Instead, God responds simply 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' The power of God is known most fully as we receive gratefully his forgiving, life-sustaining love. Paul responds 'Therefore I will boast all the more about my weaknesses so that Christ's power may rest on me' Isaiah-cleansed and forgiven- responds to God's invitation "Whom shall I send?" by eagerly replying- despite his natural weakness- 'Here am I, send me!' He now trusts in God's power and not his own. Like Paul and all who believe, he knew the reality that "When I am weak, then I am strong" in God's strength, which like God's love cannot fail. Isaiah's weakness, like Paul's thorn in the flesh, became an opportunity to serve others for God with a soul-touching vulnerability that made them both more effective instruments for God. God's Son dying in weakness like a criminal on the cross to conquer our sin and death is the ultimate sign and proof that God's strength is made perfect in weakness. For those who love and follow Jesus Christ, our limitations, weaknesses, and even our moral failures are transformed to be 'strengths'—ways we can

touch others more deeply with Christ's love, even as we have been touched with it despite our weaknesses.