

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 38

Day 260. Read Isaiah 25.28.13; Galatians 3.10-22;
Psalm 61.1-8; and Proverbs 23.18.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: For *all* people. On *this* mountain. God will provide a rich feast for all people on Mt. Zion, the hill upon which the temple was built. The prophet, Isaiah, proclaims the stunning deed God will one day do there: he will swallow up death forever, wiping away the tears from all faces and removing the disgrace of his people forever. These words will be fulfilled centuries later when a man dies on a cross here. And in the meantime, a powerful promise from the Lord through his prophet: 'You will keep in perfect peace the person whose mind is steadfastly fixed on God, because he or she trusts in you.' But the day is coming when everything will be put right, when the heavenly banquet begins. Again and again the phrase rings out from Isaiah: 'In that day!' That day is the last Day, the judgment day when God will make all things new as he judges the earth. **Questions:** 1. How does it affect my thoughts, words and actions now to know that one day I will sit at the banquet God will provide in eternity for all who believe and follow him here and now? 2. How does it change my attitude and actions to know that Christ conquered my sin and death when he died for me on the cross? 3. What am I doing to help all people to sit at the great banquet with God and all the faithful? With whom am I sharing Christ, so they might come to faith and everlasting life?

Galatians: Works or faith? Are we saved by faith or by our works? The long answer is by 'faith alone without works,' but the shortest (and truest) answer is: Yes! Yes, we are saved by faith and not by works. To be saved by our own works would mean to keep the whole law, without breaking the least part of it. No one does that. 'Cursed is everyone who does not do everything written in the Law,' Paul quotes from the Old Testament. And then he quotes from Habbakuk, 'The righteous will live by faith.' And here is where the works come in, not saving, but savoring of salvation. The righteous *live* by faith. Faith is a lively, active thing, automatically issuing in complementary works. The works of the righteous complete the faith of the faithful, like a fruit ripening to fullness. The whole world...and everyone in it...is imprisoned in sin. Salvation is given as a free gift received through faith in Jesus Christ. And the free gift changes the life of the gifted forever. **Questions:** 1. How does the amazing love of God in giving me salvation as a free gift, though it cost

Christ his life on the cross, spur me on to greater works in gratitude to him? 2. Are there times and ways I still doubt God's gracious love, either seeking to earn his favor by good works, or despairing that I ever can be good enough? 3. Am I in danger of taking God's free gift of forgiveness too lightly, taking it for granted, without responding with my good works out of gratitude? Do I show my gratitude and love to God in service to and for him? How?

Prayer: A gift, God!? All this, just for me? For me, yes. For me he embraced the cross and the tomb. That I might take my place there at the great banquet of life, he took my place of death here. All this, just for me. And, yet, not just for me. For all people. For everyone I know. And so, excuse me, Lord, before I come to the banquet. I must get to work. Doing what? Why, your work Lord! There are people to serve, people to invite. There are many others I know, to whom you want to give the Gift. And I want them to sit beside me at the Banquet, just as you wanted me to sit beside you. Amen.

Day 261. Read Isaiah 28.14-30.11; Galatians 3.23-4.31;
Psalm 62.1-12; and Proverbs 23.19-21.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: The cornerstone is the key to the whole foundation. Solid and true, the whole building can rise from it, solid and true like its foundation. 'I am laying a cornerstone in Zion,' God declares. The foundation must come from God, if it is to be solid and true. 'The one who trusts will never be dismayed or ashamed,' he declares through his prophet, Isaiah. Founding your life and your ways on this foundation will make you like the cornerstone itself—solid and true. 'I will make justice the measuring line and righteousness the plumb line,' God declares, for all things will be aligned with the cornerstone. The problem in the world? We turn things upside down, as if the potter were like the clay. As if the Creator were like the people. We create gods in our own image and likeness instead of being who we were created to be, people reflecting the very image and likeness of God, people founded on the cornerstone of God's creating. 'Can the pot say to the potter he knows nothing?' Isaiah asks. Even so do we, when we found our lives on anything but the cornerstone, and use any measuring or plumb line, other than the one God provides. Align your words and deeds...your very life...on the cornerstone. And the cornerstone is Christ, as both Peter and Paul will attest (1 Peter 2.6 & Ephesians 2.20). **Questions:** 1. How aligned am I with the cornerstone in my words and actions? What areas of my life, and what relationships in particular, yet need to be aligned to him? 2. If justice is the measuring line, how do I measure up? Are there situations and relationships in which I am not doing justice to others? How can I improve? 3. If I am the clay and God is the potter, how is God shaping me through his gifts and my experiences, and for what purpose? Do I tend to tell the Potter what he can and can't do, or do I give him free reign, trusting him to

know and do best? What hinders me from allowing him totally free reign over my life? What steps will I take to remedy those factors that keep me from a fuller life with Christ?

Galatians: Faith in Christ is the great leveler and the great unifier. It is the only thing that will ever free and unite humanity. 'You are all sons and daughters of God through faith!' Paul declares. 'There is neither Jew nor Greek, male nor female, slave or free person, because all are one in Christ Jesus!' By sending his only Son, born of a woman like us all, born under the law, God has redeemed us and won for us the full rights of sons and daughters. The very Spirit within us that leads us to cry to God, 'Abba!, Father!' bears witness that we are sons and daughters now. But amazingly, like the Christ-followers living in Galatia to whom Paul addressed this letter, we, too, can fall away. We can turn back from being children of God to dally again with the things and attachments of this world, looking to them for our good instead of God. We can seek to secure our own life and well-being through our own actions, instead of receiving life from God through faith and living it gratefully toward and for God in response. Paul compares his struggles to bring them to faith with the pain of a woman in difficult childbirth; for he is trying to bring them forth to real life with Christ, though they resist. **Questions:** 1. Who 'birthed' me to real faith—a personal, trusting relationship with Jesus Christ—and helped free me from my own attempts to secure life and well-being for myself through my own actions? 2. How does it change my attitude and actions to know that God has given me the full rights to be his child by sending his Son to die in my place? Do I live up to being God's child by acting lovingly and generously to others, as God has acted toward me? 3. Do I call God 'Abba' or what is the same in English as 'Papa' or 'Dad'? Am I that loving and familiar with him? Has it really sunk in that God really wants that intimate form of relationship with me? How would my life look if I totally trusted the truth that God loves me like that?!

Prayer: Most gracious, heavenly Father... What? Closer? You want me to come closer to you? Like a little child climbing in its parent's lap? That close? I don't know. You want me to call you...Papa? Oh, that is too ...too bold...even brazen. How can I call the God who created the galaxies, who is incomparably greater than they...Daddy? Yet, your Spirit within me teaches me so, urges me on, like a loving parent teaching its infant how to say 'Dadda' or 'Mama.' Very well, Abba, if you will be my Papa, I will be your child. I will crawl into your lap and let you love me as your heart desires. And I will love you as your love gives me ability...like your own Child, in whose Name I make this prayer. For his sake, I am your namesake now. Thank you, Abba. I love you. Amen.

Day 262. Read Isaiah 30.12-33.12; Galatians 5.1-12;
Psalm 63.1-11; and Proverbs 23.22.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: The wall looms above, bulging and cracking, ready to break and fall at any instant. Relying on oppression and deceit, Israel's sin has made their position that precarious. And when their collapse comes, it will be so complete they will be like a piece of pottery that is shattered so profoundly not even a piece can be found to scoop coals from a hearth or water from a cistern. Repentance—turning to the Lord and his ways—is the way of salvation, but they will not go there. Instead, they think they will be able to escape by their own strategies and strength. Instead, they will turn to Egypt for help, looking for practical help from worldly powers, turning to other gods who are really no gods. Nevertheless, throughout it all, God provides a voice telling the way out. Their loving God gives them the bread of adversity and the water of affliction as a consequence for their actions and to turn them into the way of life. He also gives them teachers, like Isaiah, so their ears will hear a voice behind them when they turn aside, saying 'This is the way; walk in it.' He prophesies that a King will one day reign in righteousness; and in his time, the eyes that would not see and the ears that would not hear will be opened. Centuries before the Galilean came, his coming is predicted, along with the healing he will bring. **Questions:** 1. Whenever I do wrong or go wrong in my life, how do I experience the same sense of impending danger that Isaiah spoke about? In my body? In my mind? 2. How good am I at listening to such warnings and turning quickly? How can I get better at this? 3. Better still, how can I learn better to listen for God speaking to me, as I make my decisions and take actions like the 'voice behind me' Isaiah spoke about?

Galatians: Running a good race, they fell. But this was no fall with a skinned knee or even a broken leg. This was no stumble. This was a fatal fall. They have fallen from grace! They have fallen from salvation itself. Having begun in freedom, the Christ-followers of Galatia were returning to slavery. They gave up the freedom of grace and faith in favor of works again, seeking to assure their salvation through their own efforts. Really, they were tripped. A false teacher had told them they needed to obey the ceremonial law...to be 'religious' in following the rule and rituals, rather than trusting totally in the reality of relationship with God created through faith in Christ. They were running so well, only to fall. **Questions:** 1. Am I running the race fully on grace and faith, or am I still seeking to assure my own salvation through religious acts, rule keeping, and rituals? 2. In those times in my life when I have stumbled or even fallen, who was there like Paul to admonish me and help me rise? 3. Whom do I know who is stumbling or in danger of falling who needs me to help them carry on the good race? What compassionate, confidential step will I take to help them?

Prayer: Why do I shy so from the freedom you offer me, my loving Lord? I would rather return to my all too familiar slavery, the well-worn ways I go because I can't stand the awful reality of freedom. In my rules and rituals and even habitual wrongs, I settle for a strange comfort and stability, like a prisoner pacing the limited steps of his cell. It never works, though. It never really satisfies. Like a lion locked in a cage in a zoo, something deep inside chafes and longs for freedom. We are made for freedom. We are made for your grace and the freedom that comes from faith in you and following you. You won't let me remain caged. You won't rest until all your children are free.

Keep beating against the bars until you break them, even...and especially...when I build the bars myself. Amen.

Day 263. Read Isaiah 33.13; Galatians 5.13-26;
Psalm 64.1-10; and Proverbs 23.23.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Who can dwell with this God? He is a consuming fire, his perfect holiness everlasting burning to unrighteousness. Only the one who walks in perfect righteousness may live with him. The one who always speaks what is right. The one who always rejects personal gain from injustice. One day such a one—a king—will rise in Zion. One day righteousness will fill the land like streams and rivers. One day the desert will rejoice and blossom. Then the eyes of the blind will be opened; the ears of the deaf unstopped; the mute mouth will shout for joy; the lame legs will leap. A highway called the Way of Holiness will be there, and only those who are redeemed will walk there. Only those redeemed! The sinner shall be set free. The unrighteous shall be forgiven. They are the ransomed...the ones bought back...and they will return to Zion, the community of the King, with rejoicing. **Questions:** 1 How has God provided that I, who am unholy, might live with him in his perfect holiness? Do I trust totally that God has already accomplished that, so that my attitudes and actions reflect this wonderful, new reality? 2. Do I meditate on God's perfections, particularly his perfect holiness? Do I praise and thank him for it? 3. How has Jesus opened my eyes, ears, mouth and legs, helping me come wholly alive? What do I do with the new life he has given me by his amazing grace?

Galatians: I am free. When I believe and follow Jesus Christ, I am finally and fully free. That's a fact. But how shall I use my freedom? To gratify myself again? That is not freedom, that is the old bondage...setting up again the old idol - Self. Rather, freedom serves other in love. The freedom of faith fulfills the entire law, all that we need to do; for that is summed up in the simple words, 'Love your neighbor as yourself.' To love is to serve. The acts of the old nature are obvious...all self-serving. People who live that way will not inherit the kingdom. They cannot inherit the kingdom, because they want no part of it. In the kingdom of God, the Self is set aside; God and the neighbor are the focus of all the attention, all the love. The Spirit rules there, and the fruit of the Spirit is everywhere obvious: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There the old nature, together with its passions and desires, is put to death...crucified with Christ...and the new nature rises. Living by the Spirit, the faithful keep step with the Spirit. They are free as they follow in his steps. **Questions:** 1. What aspect of the old, sinful nature is strongest in me right now? 2. How does serving my neighbor put to death or 'crucify' my old nature? Which neighbor of mine most needs my service right now? Which neighbor of mine who needs my service do I least like and most avoid? What service can I do for them that will really crucify the old nature in me? 3. Of

the fruits of the Spirit, which have been best formed in me to this point in my life with God? Have I thanked God for these gifts? Which most need to be developed still? Have I asked the Holy Spirit to provide opportunities for service that will help me develop them?

Prayer: Set me free for service. Thank you God, for setting me free from what has bound me most and most kept me enslaved...my own Self. Oh, that Self is still strong. It struggles as you crucify it on the cross of my neighbor's need, where it must die that the other might find life. Your Spirit is rising; as the Spirit did at the Beginning, moving over the chaos, making me a new creation. Create in me, Holy Spirit, the new fruit of the new being that is Christ in me: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, gentleness, self-control. Form Christ in me, and then I will be completely free...and completely yours. Amen.

Day 264. Read Isaiah 37.1-38.22; Galatians 6.1-18;
Psalm 65.1-13; and Proverbs 23.24-25.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Truly God's hand is over the great and the small alike. God delivers a whole nation. Then God delivers a single man. An Assyrian army encamped at the gates of Jerusalem, bent on conquest. The commander demanded complete and unconditional surrender, threatening death and destruction if not obeyed. Hezekiah, king of Judah, turned to God, and God sent word through his prophet, Isaiah: 'Do not be afraid. I will put a spirit in him that when the Assyrian king hears a report he will return to his own country only to be killed there.' And that is what happened. Before he departed, the Assyrian king sent a threatening letter, warning he would come again and conquer the city. Hezekiah took the letter and spread it out before God in the temple. It wasn't that he thought God had to see the letter to know or understand what was happening. Hezekiah prayed, 'You alone are God over all the kingdoms of the earth, now deliver us.' This faithful king trusted not in his own might or the power of his kingdom, as the Assyrian king did. He trusted in God alone. And God responded: 'Because you have prayed to me, the Assyrian king will not enter this city or even shoot an arrow here, for I will defend this city and save it for my sake and the sake of David, my servant.' For the sake of his Servant, God delivers anyone who turns to him. Later King Hezekiah lay at the point of death from an illness. Isaiah, the prophet, spoke God's hard word to him saying, 'Put your affairs in order, for you will not recover.' Hezekiah turned his face to the wall and prayed, 'Remember, Lord, how I have walked before you in faith' and wept. Isaiah had not even gotten out of the palace after delivering the message of doom when God's Word came again: 'I have heard your prayer, seen your tears, and will add fifteen more years to your life.' Hezekiah penned God's praises after his recovery, saying, 'You restored me to life and let me live. In your love you have kept me from the pit and put all my sins behind your back.' Truly God's hand is over the affairs of kingdoms and every detail of every individual

life. **Questions:** 1. How is it a matter of faith that God is sovereign over the whole world? How much do I believe that? How does my faith, or lack of it, affect my attitudes and actions in life? 2. How is it a matter of faith that God is interested in every detail of my life? How much do I believe that? How does my faith in this, or lack of it, affect my attitudes and actions in life? 3. What threat or situation most challenges my faith in God's almighty power and loving care in my life right now? How can I give that to God, just as Hezekiah did?

Galatians: Neither circumcision - commanded by the old law - nor un-circumcision counts for anything. Nothing human or of this world counts. What counts is being part of the new creation, ushered in by the cross of Christ, by which a believer is crucified to the world; and the world is crucified to the believer. There are unmistakable signs of the new creation in people. Those created anew carry one another's burdens, thereby fulfilling the law of Christ, who commanded, 'love one another as I have loved you.' In the new creation, there is no comparing ourselves with others. Each person bears the stamp of uniqueness and holds responsibility as a person for their own actions. The newly-created do not grow weary in doing good. At every opportunity we are to do good to all people and especially to those in the family of faith. In this world everyone reaps what one sows. The one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. They are the Spirit's new creation. **Questions:** 1. What things tend to make me grow weary of doing good? How can I combat them? 2. Which is harder for me, doing good for people 'outside' the faith, or for people 'inside' the faith? Do I make a distinction between the two or treat them equally?

Prayer: God, open my eyes to the burdens others are bearing alone, and then open my hands to help them bear them. You care for each person...and every part of their life. Let me care as you care. Amen.

Day 265. Read Isaiah 39.1-41.16; Ephesians 1.1-23;
Psalm 66.1-20; and Proverbs 23.26-28.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: After the storm comes the calm. After many warnings, after predictions of destruction and doom, God sends his Word of consolation. It like the difference between night and day, so much so that many have said another prophet is writing. But the same God speaks in all. In both warning and consolation. 'Comfort, comfort my people, says your God.' He is still our God, despite our wandering away, despite our running after other gods. 'Speak tenderly to Jerusalem and proclaim her service is ended and her sin has been paid for.' In the desert prepare the way of the Lord; for he is coming, the everlasting God, Creator of the ends of the earth. He will not grow weary. He gives strength to the weary. All the people of the earth will see his glory. Those who wait on him will renew

their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles. They will run and not grow weary. They will walk and not faint. This is the promise of God. **Questions:** 1. How does it comfort me to know that my sins have been paid for completely? 2. How does keeping my focus on God and keeping my relationship with God strong give me strength, so I don't grow weary? When have I soared like an eagle? Run? Walked patiently with God through troubles? 3. How and when have I seen the glory of God in the face of Christ?

Ephesians: His will, hidden in mystery until the proper time, is to unite all things in heaven and earth under Christ. In him, all who believe have redemption through his blood, the full forgiveness of all sins. All who believe are blessed with every spiritual blessing in Christ. We were chosen in him before the foundation of the world to be holy and blameless in God's sight through Christ. All that remains is to receive the fullness. So Paul writes, 'I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened, so you may know the hope to which he has called you and his riches and his power for us who believe.' Grace and peace for God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ. Our Father! Millions and millions say that 'our,' and all of them are one because he is our Father in Christ.

Questions: 1. How does it affect my attitudes and actions in life to know I was already included in God's redemption plan from before creation itself? 2. Do I really appreciate the gift of being allowed to call God, 'Father'? What relationship does that imply and what degree of intimacy? 3. Do I really understand who is involved when I say 'our' Father? Who is included in 'our'?

Prayer: Open the eyes of my heart, Lord; open the eyes of my heart to the mystery of your plan to redeem me and this dying world. From before creation you had your heart set on me...and each person in this world...to unite all under your crucified Son. In your glorious plan we all stand under the cross, all as one. May I realize and may I share the riches of the redemption you have given me in Christ. By his blood I am forgiven and given the riches that are his. Those are the only riches that increase the more I give them away. Open my heart and hands to give, giving God. Amen.

Day 266. Read Isaiah 41.17-43.13; Ephesians 2.1-22 ;
Psalm 67.1-7; and Proverbs 23.29-35.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: 'The poor and needy search desperately for water, but there is none,' mourns God, 'So I will make rivers flow on the barren heights, springs in the valleys, and turn the desert into pools of water.' God desires that wherever they are, the thirsty may have the water of life. God will do it...through his Servant. God will put his Spirit on him. He will care so tenderly for the people in need that he will be like someone who won't even break a bent reed or quench a smoldering wick that's nearly snuffed out. His servant will open the eyes

that are blind, free the captives from prison, release those who languish in dungeon-like darkness. God, himself, will come to be with his people as they pass through the floods or fires. God, himself, will be their savior. He will gather his sons and daughters from afar, from all four corners of the earth, together in one community again. God himself will do this, through his Servant. **Questions:** 1. How have I been (or am I now) 'thirsty' or like 'a bruised reed' or a 'dimly burning wick'? That is, in what ways have I been (or am I now) thirsty, or hurting and in need of God's compassion and kindness myself? Who has been God's servant to help me? 2. Who around me is like the bruised reed or dimly burning wick in need of God's healing and new life? How can I be God's servant to help them?

Ephesians: What is it like to be dead? We should know. We have all been dead already. Dead in sin. Dead in following the ways of this world, which lead to death and are themselves a living death. Dead by being under the power and dominion of the Evil One whose end is destruction. Dead by being manipulated and motivated by that evil Spirit who has been at work within us and through us, in mocking caricature of the Holy Spirit who was meant to dwell in us, as if in his temple. But now we have been made alive with Christ. Made alive, even when we were dead in transgressions. It is by grace we have been saved through faith. Not just made alive, either, but lifted up by Christ into the heavenly realms to share the life and love of the living God forever. It is the gift of God. We are God's masterpieces, his workmanship, created to do good works which he himself prepared for us to do. We who were far away have been brought near...right into the very presence of God, right into intimate relationship with God again. Who could be farther away from the living God than those who are dead in sin? Jesus has broken down the dividing walls that separate God and people, and people from people. All through his cross, reconciling God and people, and people to one another. The child who was dead has come home alive! No longer aliens or strangers, the lost have been brought back home. Through his cross. His cross! **Questions:** 1. What does it mean to me that I have been brought back to life by Jesus Christ? Do I live, speak and act differently, like someone given a second chance at life? How? 2. Since I had been far off but now have been brought close to God, how can I help others who are far off from God come closer to him? 3. Whom do I know who is far off from God? What specifically will I do to help them be brought closer to God?

Prayer: Lord, I think I still don't realize how far away from you I actually was...or still am. I always thought I was basically okay. I justified and rationalized all my wrongful thoughts, words and actions, explaining them away as reasonable or better than others around me. I was dead wrong. I was just dead. But even then you loved me. Even then...long before I was born in fact...Jesus died on the cross, so I might be made alive. How can what has brought me so close to you, at the same time, make me aware of how far away I was...and am...from being who I am again because of Christ: your child. You have lifted me so high...right beside you to heaven itself...me who had fallen so low. All praise to your wondrous love! Now lead me to do the very works you have appointed for me...your work of bringing your lost children home. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 38

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Isaiah 30.8-11

Psalm: 64.1-10

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Galatians 5.1-6

Theme: The Illusion of Freedom, Or The Real Thing?

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 38:

'Ignorance is bliss,' society says, and so practices living an illusion. We project false images of ourselves, propped up with all kinds of pretence. Commercials create unattainable images of what we can be and do, luring us to seek after mirages. We surround ourselves with possessions and pleasures and positions that give the illusion of freedom and life lived in fullness; when, in fact, we are enslaved by our illusions. Life lived this way is like seeking solid footing in quicksand. When one comes to Christ in faith, the illusions are exposed, often times through painful reality checks; and yet, ultimately, we are set free. Such radical freedom, while scary to our false self that clings to illusion to preserve its fragile existence, is what our true selves truly long to share. We are set free to be who we are in Christ: children of God, accepted and loved for who we truly are.

Alternate Sets of Readings & Themes:

1. **Isaiah 40.1-5; Psalm 63.1-11; Ephesians 2.1-10.** Like water to those dying of thirst, God provides freely what we cannot gain through our own striving: salvation by grace through faith, life as we long for it to be. We respond to God's gift of grace by doing the good work of God in telling others and serving their needs as God has done for us.
2. **Isaiah 40.27-31; Psalm 66.1-12; Galatians 5.19-6.2.** God gives us strength to carry one another's burdens, fulfilling the 'law of Christ,' which is to love one another as Christ loves us. For those who follow him, God 'will renew their strength' like the eagle, so they 'walk and do not grow weary,' which means show forth the fruits of the Spirit in their lives and serve day by day with God's love and strength instead of their own.