

Through The Bible In One Year

The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

Daily Devotional Companion

Week 39

Day 267. Read Isaiah 43.14-45.10; Ephesians 3.1-21;
Psalm 66.1-18; and Proverbs 24.1-2.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: God is the living God who cannot be reigned, contained, or even explained, ultimately. His actions cannot be predicted, unless he reveals his plans. So he says to Isaiah, his prophet, and through his prophet to his people, “See, I am doing a new thing right now; don’t you perceive it?” He is making a way in the wilderness and streams in the desert for people to come to him, the people he formed for himself. He will even use a pagan king, Cyrus, as his servant to accomplish his purposes. He promises to pour his Spirit upon his people, so their offspring will spring up like grass after a rain or like poplar trees do by flowing streams. This God is the first and the last. Apart from him, there is no God. The people of this world, and even his own people, seek to create their own gods. They are just parodies of the living God. They carve idols with their own hands, using half the log to fashion the idol and the other half on the fire to warm themselves. They move their idols about with their own hands, mimicking the living God who can move about at will. They carve eyes and ears and lips on their idols, hoping they will see and hear and speak to help them; but they remain blind, deaf, and dumb blocks of wood. Even though the people do this, the Living God lovingly calls to them, ‘Return to me, for I have redeemed you.’ He is the living God. Apart from him, there is no other. Apart from him, there is no help, no hope. He calls: ‘Return to me!’ **Questions:** 1. Why do I still try to find help and hope for life’s troubles in things other than God, especially through my own actions and attempts to secure myself? 2. What are the things that I tend to fall back on for help instead of relying on God? 3. Since God specializes in doing ‘new things,’ what new things has he done in my life lately? What new things has he done in my relationship with him?

Ephesians: O, the mystery of Christ, hidden for ages but now revealed through his apostles and prophets! That through the cross of Christ God would include all the peoples of the earth, together with the ‘chosen’ people, through whom Jesus Christ was born into the world! Oh, the mysterious love of God in Christ that would use Paul, the ‘least’ of the apostles because he persecuted Christ and killed Christians before becoming a Christ-

follower himself, to be the one to preach to the foreigners. Paul's heartfelt prayer is that through his inexhaustible riches God will strengthen all who follow Christ with power through his Spirit, so that Christ will dwell in their hearts through faith. He prays that they, being rooted and established in love, may have power to grasp how deep and wide and high and long is the love of Christ for them and for all. He prays that, knowing this love that transcends all knowledge, they will be filled themselves with the very fullness of God. Can God do that? Fill us with his very fullness? God is able to do far more than anything we think or imagine! To God be glory and praise in his people, the Church, and in his Son, Jesus Christ, forever! **Questions:** 1. When I ponder the 'mysterious' plan of God that includes me, a foreigner, among the people of God through the cross of his Son, what kinds of thoughts and feelings arise in me? 2. Do I believe that Paul's prayer that power and presence of God's fullness live within me, includes me personally? Have I prayed this to God for myself? For others I know? 3. How does contemplating and accepting the amazing love of God for me, personally in Christ, change my thoughts and actions? How does it change the way I relate to God and other people?

Prayer: Go ahead, God, do your work...make me new! I still can't comprehend your mysterious plan that cost Christ his life, so I could live with you. And not just me, but everyone else who has been far away from you like me, can be brought near through faith in him. Now that you have brought me near, you are pouring all the riches of your love and wisdom and power—your very Spirit—inside me! Go ahead, God; pour it on. Make me new. Make me like Christ! Do what you are so good at doing: do what is far beyond anything I can ask or imagine! The sooner the better, whatever it costs me! All I want is you...and your will for me and everyone around me. Amen.

Day 268. Read Isaiah 43.11-48.11; Ephesians 4.1-16;
Psalm 68.19-35; and Proverbs 24.3-4.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: The whole earth? Everyone in it? 'Turn to me and be saved, all the ends of the earth,' God calls, 'for I am God; there is no other!' The living God, alone, makes known the end from the beginning, foretells what is still to be from ancient times long before. This God accomplishes what he pleases, and his will stands. He foretold former things long before their appointed time, then suddenly acted to accomplish them at the time he appointed. Astrologers, stargazers, idol makers...they and their idols cannot do what God does, cannot proclaim what is to come before it happens. Turn to the living God, everyone in the earth! Trust in him alone. He promises that even to your old age and gray hairs he will rescue you...sustain you...even carry you! **Questions:** 1. How does it strengthen and encourage me to know that all times...including the days and seasons of my own, personal life...are in God's hands? 2. How does his promise that even to old age he will rescue, sustain, and carry me affect my attitude and actions? 3. How does the reality

of prophecy and fulfillment in Scripture and history strengthen my faith in God and for my witness for God to others who are still seeking a relationship with God?

Ephesians: I am part of Christ's body, alive and at work in the world. I - along with all the people who answer God's invitation - have received God's call to the one body, one Spirit, one hope, one Lord, one faith, one baptism, the one God and Father over all and through all and in all. Now it lies to me - to everyone who responds in accepting the call - to live a life worthy of that special calling as my obedient and grateful response. To each one - even me personally - grace has been given just as Christ decided. Some are gifted to be apostles, prophets, evangelists, pastors, and teachers, to equip all God's people for ministry—for service—so Christ's people can be built up, until all reach the fullness of maturity and attain the fullness of Christ's own character. It is only through real, spiritual relationships with those in the body of Christ, God's people, that people will grow up into Christ himself. Speaking the truth in love with each other, each person doing their work, builds up the whole body in love. Christ's body is alive and at work in the world, building itself up in love, to accomplish his loving purpose. I am in that body; and when I do the work assigned me, using the gifts he gave me, in partnership with the other people of God, I help build up his body, so everyone can grow into the fullness of Christ himself.

Questions: 1. How have I been prepared for service in Christ's body? What gifts has he given me? 2. How can I be sure to speak the truth (not avoid saying it) but always and only in love? Am I stronger on the truth-telling side or the loving side? 3. To whom am I called to 'speak the truth in love' to help build up the body of Christ and better accomplish our mission for Christ?

Prayer: Lord, draw me closer to your will and way through the knowledge of your Word. Help me to know and speak the Truth. But Lord, even more than that, lead me to speak your truth in your love. Let my words and actions - since it is truly said actions speak louder than words - be steeped in your love. Let my words and actions reflect your Son, who is the Way, the Truth, and the Life all are ultimately seeking. Guide me to use all the gifts you have given me, to do the work to which you have called me. Let me help build up others to know and reflect the fullness of the character of Christ himself. Let me reflect Christ myself, so my words and service draw others to become part of Christ's living body themselves. Amen.

Day 269. Read Isaiah 49.12-50.11; Ephesians 4.17-32;
Psalm 69.1-18; and Proverbs 24.5-6.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Two of the worst words in our language are, 'If only...' Behind them lies the sting of regret. Behind them lies a gnawing worry about what might have been, about

opportunity lost...life lost. God himself says, 'If only...' Through Isaiah he tells his people, 'If only you had followed my commands! What would have happened then? Life, as it was intended for us. 'Your peace would have been like a river, your goodness like the waves of the sea,' God says. Life, with peace and joy endlessly flowing. 'Your descendants would have been as numerous as the countless grains of sand...and what is more, their names would never be cut off from before me or destroyed.' Fruitful life, with purpose..and progeny to share it. But now, having gone our own way, peace is something that eludes human grasp; and one generation after another descends into darkness. Behind God's words lies a broken heart. God does not speak here like a cold clinician; he cries like a parent whose child has been lost. 'Leave Babylon!' he cries. 'I am the Lord your God, who teaches you what is best for you and who directs you in the way you should go to find life,' he calls. The people of God in exile in Babylon thought God had forgotten them...had turned his back on them. In this broken world, even a mother may forget her nursing child, but God will not. 'I have graven you on my hand,' he declares. God is appointing his Servant, who will bring his people back to him...and more. Not just his 'chosen people' who had strayed, but all people. 'I will make you a light for the foreigners, that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth!' he tells his Servant. Though in exile, their numbers had diminished till they feared they would die out completely, God promises the day will come when the people of God will say, 'this place is too small for us; give us more space to live in!' The 'If only' of what we failed to do will be forgotten in the 'Now surely' of what God has done for us in his love. Love will engrave forever, with the mark of piercing nails on the very hands of God, the people he holds so dear, so he can never forget them. And by dying, he will give life to so many heaven itself will be needed to hold them all! **Questions:** 1. What regrets of the 'if only' kind gnaw at my peace? How does Satan use them to accuse me or weaken my joy and work in Christ? How does knowing that I am graven on the very hands of Christ, because he loved me so much as to suffer crucifixion for me, take away or transform that regret? How does it free me for life and work with God? 3. Whom can I tell about God's love for them, so they can be freed of regret and have life in fullness with God forever?

Ephesians: I was darkened in my understanding, like everyone else, before Christ came into my life as my light. I was cut off from the life of God, like everyone else, before Christ reconciled and connected me with God again. I, like everyone else, was on a bender, seeking to indulge every kind of impurity and sensuality, continually wanting more. That is the way people live who don't know the Lord. That is the way I lived. No more. Now it is up to me to put off the old self, my old way of life, and to be who in Christ I am: a new person with a new mind, created in Christ to be like God, and share his character. I must put off falsehood, to speak the truth to people. I must not hold onto my anger, for doing so gives the Devil a beachhead by which to invade and attack my soul. Stealing is out. I must work with my own hands, so I can earn something with which to help people in need. Unwholesome talk must not be heard from my mouth, but only words that build people up. My words and actions must reflect the very kindness and compassion of Christ; for that is who, by the grace of God, I now am. I was like all people; but now I am to be like Christ, who is what all people are intended to be...and can be in Christ. **Questions:**

1. What was my life before Jesus became Lord? How has it changed since? 2. What am I doing to put off my old nature or Self? Am I working at it actively as God says, or am I passively waiting for God to accomplish it? 2. What am I intentionally doing to put on my new Christ-like self? What character traits of Christ do I need to supplant for old character traits I have? What practical steps will I take to work on them?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, you have graven me on your hands...and feet...your side...and even your brow. The nails, the spear, the thorns were mine that pierced you. You never will forget me now...because you love me. I know you regret nothing that you suffered, because you accomplished your purpose. I am yours. Fully and forever. Strengthen and guide me for the work of putting off my old nature and putting on my new self. You have already done the main work, taking away my sin and giving me new life with you. Now help me become who I already am in your Father's eyes...like You, his child. Amen.

Day 270. Read Isaiah 51.1-53.12; Ephesians 5.1-33;
Psalm 69.19-36; and Proverbs 24.7.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Look to the rock from which you were quarried, all who seek the Lord. Look to the people of faith who gave you birth: Abraham your father and Sarah your mother. When called they were of no account, but God blessed them and made them many. Just so the Lord will make many from those who follow him, however few they may be. The community to which God addressed these words of hope through his prophet, Isaiah, had been decimated by their own failings and by foreign oppressors as a consequence. But now God promises a renewal for them. God promises to comfort Zion, look with compassion on her ruin, make her desert like Eden again, so joy and the sound of singing will be heard in her again. But there is more. The gladness and thanksgiving will extend far beyond the physical bounds of Zion to all the world. God's creative and life-giving word will go out from him and become a light to the nations. One day the heavens will vanish like smoke, and the earth will wear out like a garment; but the righteousness and salvation God gives will last forever. When God comforts, whom shall we fear? But most amazing of all is how God will bestow his righteousness and salvation. Salvation will come through God's Suffering Servant, who will be despised and rejected by men. He will bear our iniquities and be pierced for our transgressions. He will be whipped; and by his wounds, we will be healed. He will not open his mouth but remain silent through his trial. He will be numbered with transgressors and pray for those doing the wrong. His grave will be with the rich. But because he obediently submits to suffering for others as ordained by God, he will see again the light of life and will justify many; because he bore their sins. The righteousness he brings from God will endure forever. **Questions:** 1. How many specific

points of Isaiah's prophecy in 53:1-12 can I find which are fulfilled in the accounts of Jesus' trial, suffering, crucifixion, burial, and resurrection? 2. How does the fulfillment of so many specific points in the prophecy of Isaiah in the crucifixion of Jesus Christ strengthen my faith and assurance of salvation? 3. What does it do for my courage and confidence in following Jesus to know that my salvation is assured for all eternity, because he removed my sins and gave me new life with God? How does that reality change my attitudes and actions every day?

Ephesians: You are who you imitate. Children learn most by imitating others. They imitate most - for good or ill - their parents. As children of God, Paul urges that all Christ-followers are to imitate God. We are to live a life of love like Christ himself, who loved us and gave himself for us as a sacrifice to God. Among God's children there should not even be a hint of sexual immorality, impurity, greed; because there is none in God. Neither should there be obscenity, foolish talk, coarse jokes. There are none of those traits in God, and neither should there be in God's children. People who do those things...people whose character is like that do not—in fact cannot—inherit from God the kingdom. Once all were in the same darkness of such deeds, under the shadow of such a wayward nature. But now, in the Lord Jesus Christ, everyone who believes and lives in him is light. We are called and empowered through Christ to live as children of the light and have nothing to do with deeds of darkness. We are careful how we live every moment, making the most of every opportunity to imitate God and live as children of the light. Every relationship, even the most intimate one of marriage, is an opportunity to grow and live toward God. We live filled with God's Spirit, making joyful, child-like music to the Lord in our hearts, giving thanks like a grateful child in every situation to God, our loving Father. **Questions:** 1. How was my life characterized by darkness before I came to a personal, faith relationship with God? 2. What shadows of my fallen nature and its dark deeds still linger? How can I live as a child of the light and dispel this lingering darkness? What do I need to imitate in Christ most right now? 3. Is the quality of my heart right now a joyful and grateful song to God? Why or why not? What keeps me from childlike joy and total trust in God, that would make my life a song?

Prayer: Silent before your accusers. Whipped and wounded in my place. Pierced with nails, thorns, and even a spear for my transgressions. Numbered with transgressors, one on your right and one on your left. Praying for the very ones who killed you...praying for me. Buried in a grave borrowed from a rich man. And rising to life again... to make many righteous. To make me righteous. Thank you, my loving Lord Jesus. Thank you, Father; for you decided on this dreadful way to win me back centuries before the Cross, before the beginning of time. You have dispelled the darkness and brought me into your light. Let me live as a child of the light. Let me imitate you, Father, so I think and act like you. Let me live a life of love, just as Christ loved me and gave himself up for me. Let me bring you joy as your obedient child, just as Jesus does. Amen.

Day 271. Read Isaiah 54.1-57.13; Ephesians 6.1-24;

Psalm 70.1-5; and Proverbs 24.8.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: The living God is near. He can be found. He wants to be found. That is why he bids his prophet, Isaiah, proclaim: 'Seek the Lord while he may be found, and call upon him while he is near.' Where shall we seek him? Where can we find him? His thoughts are not our thoughts; his ways not our ways. As the soaring galaxies of the vast universe are so beyond our comprehending, so are God's thoughts and ways far beyond our understanding. Where then can we find him? How shall we seek him? In his Word. The living God, this divine Person, speaks to make himself known, to establish relationship with us. As the snow and rain come down from the sky and water the earth, causing it to flourish with life, so is God's Word as it comes to us. His revelation brings us to life - accomplishes its intended purpose ~ when it meets receptive hearts. So, like a water seller on a hot and dusty street corner, God has his prophet cry out to the people in exile: 'Whoever is thirsty come to me; and whoever is hungry come and eat, without money, without cost! Give ear and come to me, listen to me that your soul may live.' Like the thirsty ground drinking in the rain, drink in God's revelation that will give you life. Everyone, even the foreigner farthest away may come to him; for his Word will give life to all who receive it. **Questions:** 1. Why is it so important that I be continually connected with and growing in God's Word? What does the fact that his thoughts and ways are far beyond human understanding have to do with my need to be steadfastly learning his Word? 2. Where am I most hungry and thirsty for God in my life right now? How can God's Word help to satisfy my hunger and thirst? 3. Do I have a really big God, all-knowing and all-powerful; or do I, like most people, keep him manageable in size, or compartmentalized to just a section of my decisions and actions? How can I give God greater control over my life?

Ephesians: The life of believers shares the very nature and character of God, and that new nature is to show in every relationship. Fathers are not to exasperate their children, but lovingly bring them up in the Lord, even as God the Father begot the Son and loves him. Children obey their parents and receive the blessing of family life, even as the Son is obedient to the Father and enjoys the love they share in common. Workers...even as slaves...obey their earthly overseers with respect and fear, as if obeying Jesus Christ himself, doing the will of God from their hearts, serving as if they were serving the Lord Jesus himself, who became a servant and was obedient even to death; so they could be free. Masters...overseers....treat your workers with respect, remembering you have a Master in heaven who loves all alike. The Enemy seeks to destroy what God is doing in the world. We cannot withstand him with our own strength. Our task is to put on the entire armor God gives us—truth, righteousness, the gospel, faith, and the Word of God. Armed with the gifts God gives, standing in our new nature, nothing can overcome us in our marriages, our homes, where we work, or where we live. **Questions:** 1. How much do I reflect the new Christ-nature in my most important relationships? What areas need most work? 2.

How does knowing that my sworn enemy, who is seeking to destroy me, is not flesh and blood affect the way I think and act? My reliance upon God for strength and protection? The way I treat people who seem contrary or troublesome? 3. Of the various pieces of armor Paul writes about, which do I need to put on the most? What steps will I take to start putting on that specific piece of armor?

Prayer: God, you are so far above and beyond me; but so is my Enemy who seeks to destroy me and all the good you have created. Thank you for coming so near to me in your Word and for revealing your thoughts and ways to me, so I can find you and call on you always. God, you want to equip me to withstand all the onslaughts of the evil one upon my family, my workplace, and my community. Help me to recognize that the chaos and havoc there is from him, and that the people who seem to be the source of the trouble really aren't. Help me to put on all the armor you offer me, piece by piece, until I am fully protected. Don't let me slack off, or make excuses, or worst of all, wait for you to do it for me. Equip me with your Word - the very sword with which I may fight for all the people you have put in my life who are so precious to you. Let me not fight them, but for them. Amen.

Day 272. Read Isaiah 57.14-59.21; Philippians 1.1-26;
Psalm 71.1-24; and Proverbs 24.9-10.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Why is our religion not paying off? Why do we do religious deeds, religious rituals rightly, with no results? So God's Old Testament people asked. The problem was that their hearts weren't in their religious acts. Their hearts were far from being engaged with God at all. They fasted; but while in the act of refraining from food, they indulged in injustice, exploiting their workers. They refrained from eating sweets and savory foods but gorged themselves on quarrels and conflict with others. How can anyone so doing expect their voice to be heard by God on high, when their voices are raised in anger against the people around them? God reveals the kind of 'religion' that he expects to come from relationship with him, the kind of behavior his people are to follow 'religiously': breaking the chains of injustice, setting the oppressed free, sharing food with the hungry, providing shelter and clothing for the needy. The right kind of fasting God looks for is to stop turning away from people in need, as if they were not of our own flesh and blood, to fast from neglecting people who are hurting and helpless. When that is done, light will shine in the darkness for everyone to see - the light of God shining through you and your acts. Then, God promises, you will call; and he will answer. He will be right there with you when you need help. You will be as beautiful and fruitful as a well-watered garden, and flow endlessly like a crystal-clear spring of water. Our iniquities have separated us from God, even and especially, our own attempts at 'religion' defined to our own liking. He saw

that there was no one who did justice and no one to intervene. So God's own arm worked salvation, and his own righteousness has set us free to become like him. **Questions:** 1. When and how do I tend to settle for 'religion' instead of reflecting a right relationship with God in my motives and actions? Do I do religious acts out of rote, without my heart and head being in them, or my actions towards others revealing a right spirit? 2. When God feels distant, who moved? Is it that I have done something—even seemingly religious acts—that really reflects my heart is moving away from him? 3. When God seems distant and my relationship with him dead, what helps me turn and come closer to God?

Philippians: Grace and peace from God *our* Father and from the Lord Jesus Christ! Grace and peace are ours, the very things we need most and most long for...limitless love and blessedness. They are available from God, who is their only source... God who is ...*our* Father! They are available because of the Lord Jesus Christ, and so come 'from' him as well. Paul begins his letter to the Christ-followers at Philippi with this brief but astounding blessing. Or is it more a proclamation than benediction? Truly it is both. Grace *and* peace. God's favor and the wholeness and well-being the springs from it. All is ours, because God is our Father; because Christ is our Lord. Paul's prayer for those Christ-followers—and we who are latter-day disciples of the same Lord—is that their (our) love would abound more and more in knowledge and depth of insight; so we can discern what is best, pure, blameless, and be filled with the fruit of righteousness to the glory and praise of God. Paul himself, a prisoner in chains, is even so bearing great fruit because of his trials. He is sacrificing and suffering to encourage others to speak God's Word of grace and peace more courageously and fearlessly, following his example. Some may proclaim out of envy of him, but what does that matter? The important thing is that the message of grace and peace through the Lord Jesus Christ be spread as widely as possible. Paul wants only to exalt Christ in all he does, whether he lives or dies. The options for him as a follower of Jesus are 'win-win.' To live is Christ, and to die is gain. Having met Christ, having even been given a vision of heaven itself once, he longs to depart and be with Christ. Then his peace will be complete. But in the meantime, life means fruitful work for the Lord and for others who need to know the message of grace and peace. **Questions:** 1. Have the grace and peace that is mine from God as my Father through the saving work of my Lord Jesus Christ really 'sunk in' for me? Do they make my life a 'win-win' situation where anything, even death itself, is gain, is moving on to a better reality? 2. How can I better appreciate what it means to call God my Father, as Jesus emphasized when he taught us to pray "Abba" and Paul does here? Do I talk intimately and frequently with God as my loving father? 3. Whom do I know who needs to know the grace and peace that can be theirs through faith in Jesus? Do I commend the grace and peace of Christ to them by my words and actions? How could I do so better?

Prayer: Father, through your Son you give me grace and peace. I am your child, because of what your only Child did for me. And now I, because of your grace, have your peace. What joy, what blessedness that peace is...far beyond the power of my words to tell. Thank you for the gift. Let me keep it and hold it tightly the only way I can...by giving it away. Let me become, in my Christ-like words and actions, a living benediction

from you that says to everyone around me, 'Grace and peace from God our Father and the Lord, Jesus Christ.' Amen.

Day 273. Read Isaiah 60.1-62.5; Philippians 1.27-2.18;
Psalm 72.1-20; and Proverbs 24.11-12.

Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

Isaiah: Thick darkness covers all the people of the earth, but the Lord arises like the dawn upon them. Let the people who sat in darkness arise and shine, for your light has finally come. Nations will come to your light and monarchs to the dawn. The people of God will be free, finally, from the oppression of their sins. In anger God brought the just consequences of their dark actions on them, but now he shows compassion. In that day, no longer will there be violence in the land. The gates of their cities will be open night and day. The community will not need light of sun or moon to shine on it, for God himself will be their everlasting light. After announcing the coming of the light to those in darkness, the prophet, Isaiah, adds a description of the one in whom the light will dawn. The Spirit of the Lord is upon him to proclaim good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to declare freedom to the captives, and announce the year of the Lord's favor. The people whom he frees will all be called priests of the Lord and ministers of God. The Light that shines on them will shine through them until all the captives are free, all the brokenhearted have healing, and all who languish in darkness know the Light.

Questions: 1. What is the darkness that covers the people here in my community? What darkness covers the nations of the world? 2. How did God's light first shine on me? Through whom? 3. Since God's Word announces that I am a priest and minister, what am I to be doing to spread the light for God and for the people who still are engulfed in darkness? What is my ministry? How and for whom should I be praying, as a priest prays to God on behalf of people?

Philippians: Like soldiers facing a foe, Christ-followers together need to 'stand firm in one spirit, contending as one person for the faith of the gospel, without being frightened by those who oppose.' But from where shall this single mindedness arise? By having the very mind...the character and nature...of Jesus Christ. It is ours in Christ Jesus. He, in the very nature of God, emptied himself, became human, took the form of a servant, and was obedient to death on a cross. For all who believe, he offers that same nature, the very same mind that is his. No selfish ambition. No vain conceit that draws attention to themselves. No looking to their own interest to the exclusion of others. No, the interest of others is more important than their own. In humility, like Christ, they consider others better than themselves. Such people shine like stars in the universe of darkness surrounding them. Christ-followers try to work out their salvation with fear and trembling, laboring to show forth the presence and power of Christ through their words and actions, knowing that

God is at work within them both to will and to do all. As Oswald Chambers wrote, they 'work out what God has worked in,' the new nature of Christ God has put within them through his indwelling Spirit and presence. **Questions:** 1. How effectively am I 'standing firm' with other believers and 'contending' for the gospel? What community of faith am I a part of? How active a part am I of that community? 2. How Christ-like is my mind? Do my thought processes and thoughts themselves reflect the nature of Christ? What part in my thinking do worldly and self-centered thoughts play? 3. How am I 'working out what God has worked in'? How am I reflecting the new nature of Christ, the nature of the Servant Son of God, which is my true nature in my thoughts, words, and actions - now that I follow Christ?

Prayer: Lord Jesus, your mind is so unlike mine. My thoughts orbit around my Self as their Sun and center. You think of your Father...and his lost children. I look for my own advantage...you look for some way to work good for others. Left to myself and my old nature, I would rise and rule in heaven if I could, while you stoop to be born in a stable, take the form of a servant, ascend not a throne but a cross. Truly, your name is above every name. Truly, every knee in heaven and on earth should bow before you. My knee bows before you. I acclaim you my Lord and King. Let your new nature rule in me. Let me think your thoughts and do your deeds. Only then will I be free and fully myself. Amen.

Through The Bible In One Year: Week 39

Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Isaiah 53.3-12

Psalm: 72.1-14

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Philippians 2.1-11

Theme: Jesus Christ - Suffering Servant And Exalted Son

Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 39:

Is the way to the peace and joy we all seek, of finding meaning and purpose in our existence, to follow the world's suggestion of putting ourselves in the center and seeking self-satisfaction? That way leads nowhere. In fact, it leads to the certain loss of all we long for and seek. God provides another way. Centuries before the events themselves, God prophesied through Isaiah that God's Servant would suffer and die for sinners, reconciling them to God. Paul writes about the fulfillment of the prophecies at the cosmic proportions of Christ's undertaking in redeeming the world to God. God's Son humbled himself to be born in human form, stooped lower yet to take the form of a servant, and

humbled himself to the utmost by obediently enduring the humiliating death of the cross, in fulfillment of his Father's will. By doing so, Christ won redemption for all who believe and earned the name that is above all names and the praises of all creation. He is the Suffering Servant and exalted Son of God. His victory and acclaim, because of his stooping to serve, are also foretold in Isaiah 43.12 & Psalm 72.1-14. Followers of Christ are called to share the same mind and the same character of Christ: to serve rather than lord it over others, out of obedience to God, sharing the nature of Christ, which is love that serves. The 'way up' in the Kingdom of God is the way down—stooping 'beneath ourselves' to serve those in need. Believers in Christ are to share the same, selfless love and service to others that Christ demonstrated. Suffering with him, we will also be exalted with him.

Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“Idols or Images?”** People were created in the image and likeness of God to reflect and live God's nature here in the world. Instead, we create idols (vain attempts to secure ourselves). Through Jesus Christ, God is creating a new people (the Church) in the image and likeness of Christ, with leaders equipping the people for ministry so all grow into the fullness of Christ himself. **Isaiah 44.12-22; Psalm 68.4-10; Ephesians 4.11-16.**
2. **“Changed and Changing.”** God's Word—his free invitation into a life-giving relationship with him that is like cool water to a thirsty soul—changes a person even, so they become themselves instruments of change in their environment. Paul, to the Ephesians, calls on them to put off the old nature and live a transformed life that, in turn, transforms others around us. **Isaiah 55.1-11; Psalm 69.1-6; Ephesians 5.21-33.**