

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

## Daily Devotional Companion

### Week 40

**Day 274.** Read Isaiah 62.6-65.25; Philippians 2.19-3.4a;  
Psalm 73.1-28; and Proverbs 24.13-14.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Isaiah:** Watchmen appointed to call day and night to wake...not a silent city but...God himself! Who appointed them to their task, to keep God awake—stirred up and working always? God himself! ‘You who call on the Lord, don’t give yourselves any rest; and give God no rest until he has established his faith community and made it the wonder of the world,’ God commands through Isaiah. Isaiah is himself told what to pray for. ‘Prepare the way for the people! Oh, that You would tear open the heavens and come down personally! We are the clay in your hands and you are the potter; so look upon us, O God, for we are your people to shape with your hands.’ As there is still some usefulness in a late cluster of grapes, that wine may still be made from it, say, ‘Don’t destroy it for there is still some good left in it.’ God responds by promising a new creation, a new heaven and earth in which ‘all the former transgressions will be forgotten and the wolf will lie down with the lamb.’ Until the fulfillment, let your cry be ‘Let it be, Lord, let it be!’ **Questions:** 1. Do I engage consistently and persistently in intercessory prayer? 2. About whom specifically do I ‘bug’ God day and night in prayer, reminding God about his need to redeem them or meet some special need? 3. If I am clay in God’s hands, how is he wanting to shape me at this point in my life? By what means is he shaping me? For what purpose? To reach or serve whom?

**Philippians:** A ‘one in a million’ spiritual son. That’s how Paul speaks of Timothy. Everyone else looks out for his or her own interests. But not Timothy. Though he is no blood kin to Paul, he has served with Paul in the work of the gospel, as a loving son does with his father. He is not alone. Epaphroditus went to Paul to serve his needs and strengthen him for his ministry and nearly died of illness because of it. Honor people like these, Paul says. There are others who will lead you away from the good news of salvation by grace through faith alone, asking you to place your trust in human works and rituals. Watch out for them. How will you know them? They will look after their own interests. **Questions:** 1. For whom am I being a Timothy right now? Whose ministry needs my support and encouragement most right now? 2. How specifically will I extend my personal support and encouragement to someone in ministry right now? 3. What (or whom) has

enticed me most in my past life to leave off following the gospel or working for it? What is enticing me most right now to do so? Busy-ness? Worldly friends or family members? My own desire for my own interests and pleasure? Something else?

**Prayer:** God, remember the lost, as once you remembered me! You would not rest until you brought me home to you. Do not rest until you bring home every one of your lost children whom I know. Give me no rest from giving you no rest. Make me a person of prayer, and set me to praying for others day and night...and every time in between the dawning of every day and the descending of every night. May my prayers to you for others become like the breathing in and out that sustains me in life every minute. And God use me to answer the very prayers I raise. Use me to reach the people you put in my prayers, so I am the answer to my own prayers. Use me to pray for and support with my words and actions others who minister the good news to others. Multiply the ministers in my faith community and multiply my prayers for them all, so your name is glorified and more and more people will live with you now and forever. Amen.

**Day 275.** Read Isaiah 66.1-24; Philippians 3.4b-21;  
Psalm 74.1-23; and Proverbs 24.15-16.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Isaiah:** Where shall God dwell? Where shall he be found? The earth is his footstool, and heaven his throne. He will be in the one who is humble, who is contrite in spirit, who trembles at God's Word. Such are hard to find. Many offer sacrifices but are really choosing their own way. They are seeking God's blessings on their own ideas and plans, not trembling before his Word to seek his will and way. Yet, God proclaims and predicts the day will come when Zion is full of such children. The day will come when such children will nurse and be satisfied at Zion's breasts. God himself will comfort those children, as a mother comforts her children. Not only his chosen people, but the people God sends them to—people from every nation under heaven—will be comforted in God's new community of faith. As the new heavens and new earth God is creating will endure before him forever, so will all humankind come and bow down in worship together before God forever. But for those who reject God's offer of life, 'their worm will not die, nor their fire be quenched forever.' Those who choose life without God instead of life with God will have their desire, too. **Questions:** 1. In what ways am I offering God outward religious sacrifices but not offering him changed actions from a changed heart? 2. How am I 'trembling at his Word' to find God's will and way for me personally? 3. How has God comforted me in 'Zion,' in the community of faith he has made me a part of? How is my community of faith reaching out for God to include others not a part of it now? How am I helping in that effort?

**Philippians:** Garbage! Everything. Every bit of my previous life, all its thoughts and desires, its ideas and deeds. Refuse! Compared to knowing Christ, even the highest and the best is worthless. Knowing Jesus Christ surpasses all, so as to render them useless...worthless. Being found in him, having his righteousness as a gift by faith, is worth renouncing all the rest. So Paul makes it his goal to know Christ and the power of his resurrection life, even if it costs the sharing in his sufferings. Like a runner who knows the goal is ahead, he presses on, never resting contented, to take hold of the prize for which Christ took hold of him. Everything behind is forgotten in order to strain forward for what lies ahead. All who are mature do that. All experienced runners focus on the goal. Others may settle for less or live as enemies of the cross of Christ, shirking to share in his sufferings, their minds set on lesser pursuits. Not those who are mature. They look for their savior who will transform them, so they will be like him. The goal lies ahead. Press on to know Christ and the sharing of his sufferings, and the glory of the resurrection that will be yours in Christ! **Questions:** 1. Do I consider knowing Christ as the single, most important thing in my life; or are there other things that vie for my attention and clamor for my loyalty as his rivals? What are the things that do so most? 2. Have I truly tasted the righteousness—the new nature and the new resurrection life— that is mine as a gift through faith in Jesus, so that nothing else matters? What strengthens my experience of and desire for it? 3. What am I doing to ‘press on’ in my relationship with Christ?

**Prayer:** Life was pointless, Lord, until you came into it. There was no purpose to it, Lord, until you came in and showed me how purposeless I truly was. I was racing around, striving in different directions, all of them dead ends, till you brought me to life. When you came in, only then did I realize what is really worthy of all my striving: knowing you. Only by knowing you have I discovered that delicious hunger that satisfies the more it grows. Only in longing for you have I found the delirious, aching longing that alone brings peace and contentment. Lord, let everything else fall away. Lead me deeper into sharing your life, your sufferings, your resurrection. Whatever it takes, Lord. Whatever it takes! Amen.

**Day 276.** Read Jeremiah 1.1-2.30; Philippians 4.1-23;  
Psalm 75.1-10; and Proverbs 24.17-20.

## **Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:**

**Jeremiah:** “I am only a....” How we complete that sentence says a lot about who we think we are, and even more about whom we think God is. Through the reigns of two kings, ultimately, until the country was carried away in captivity, Jeremiah prophesied and proclaimed God’s Word. He was the son of a priest from the town of Anathoth in the territory of the tribe of Benjamin; yet, when the Word of God came to him, he sought to decline. He had an idea of how to excuse himself. ‘I am only a youth,’ he protested. The

loving, living God replied kindly: ‘Nonsense! Do not say, ‘I am only a youth; for you must go to whomever I send you, to say whatever I command you.’ Then God reveals that he knows the real reason for Jeremiah’s evasion. ‘Do not be afraid of them,’ he consoles Jeremiah, ‘for I will be with you.’ Oh, the people will resist. They will reject Jeremiah, because they reject the God who sends him to them. They have committed two terrible sins. They have forsaken God, the spring of living water, and they have dug with their own hands cracked cisterns that cannot hold water. They have sought others gods. They seek to make gods for themselves, because they seek to be their own gods, directing their own destinies. So are all who turn from God and turn to their own efforts at securing their own lives. They die of thirst. So do not fear them. God will be with you. The question is, is God your God; and how big is he? **Questions:** 1. In what ways do I try to decline or evade God’s call to do his mission in my life and surroundings? 2. What am I most afraid of in following God and living for him? 3. How big is God to me? How much does his promise to be with me, as I seek to do his will and work, really encourage and strengthen me?

**Philippians:** Two sisters in Christ, who both strove side by side with Paul for the gospel, are now pulling in differing directions, embroiled in a conflict from some source we cannot see. Was it jealousy? Had they spoken harsh words with one another...or about one another, that got known round about ‘through the grapevine?’ We don’t know, but their differences were dividing the people of God and weakening their work for God. He begs the community of faith to help these two beloved sisters to agree. Paul calls upon all to rejoice in all circumstances. Without anxiety about anything, everyone should offer up prayers and petitions with thanksgiving. Peace which passes all understanding will be theirs, guarding their hearts and minds in Christ. Whatever is Christ-like, true, noble, pure and praiseworthy, let their thoughts dwell on that. Nothing else is necessary. Paul has learned the secret of being contented with abundance and want. He can do all things through Christ who gives him strength. Through faith in this Christ, he can even experience abundance without becoming complacent, or poverty without becoming anxious. Even when he sits in a cell in Rome, facing his trial and ultimate execution, he can seek to share the life of Christ with the very household of Caesar himself. He can even forgive the people who are persecuting him. He can do all things through him who strengthens him. **Questions:** 1. Can I do all things through Jesus who strengthens me? Can I not be changed or deflected from my mission by ‘success’ or ‘poverty’? Can I even forgive my ‘foes’? 2. Do I make time to meditate of those things that are true, noble, pure, lovely, excellent and praiseworthy, especially in God’s Word, believing that ‘you become like what you think about’? What do I think about most, God or something else? 3. What conflicts are there in my community of faith? Who needs my prayers and intervention in my community of faith to improve the climate of love in our community and our effectiveness in carrying out God’s work? What specific actions will I take this week, personally, to work on it?

**Prayer:** God, you know my excuses are hollow. Whenever I speak them, they die echoing in the air, like the sound of retreating footsteps in a dark corridor. It is fear that

keeps me from answering your calls. It is fear that keeps me from launching out into your outstretched hands that promise to catch me and clasp me tight. Lord, open my eyes to see the opportunities you lay before, my ears to hear the calls of the people with needs, and my hands to reach out for your hand. You are a big God, far bigger than I admit in my selfish smallness, far bigger than anything I will ever face. You are even big enough to forgive my smallness. Thank you, Lord. I can do anything through you. Anything you need me to do. Anything you want me to do. You're that big. Amen.

**Day 277.** Read Jeremiah 2.31-4.18; Colossians 1.1-20;  
Psalm 76.1-12; and Proverbs 24.21-22.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** Because you say, 'I have not sinned' I will pass judgment on you. Though I would gladly treat you as sons and daughters, you turned away from following me. Though I was a faithful husband, you were like an unfaithful wife to me. And yet, God calls to his Old Testament people through Jeremiah, his prophet, 'Return, O faithless people, and I will cure you. Return, O faithless Israel, and I will not frown on you.' No, he will not frown; he will smile on you. Only acknowledge your guilt. Only acknowledge that you have rebelled against God and scattered your favors in every direction, with gods of your own choosing. Then God will smile on you. Then God will give you leaders with knowledge and understanding who care for you, and you will be blessed. Then you will increase instead of dwindle, and your numbers will multiply...if you will only return to me, says your God. **Questions:** 1. Do I daily take time to reflect on my sins and confess them before God? 2. Do I meditate frequently on God's limitless gift of forgiving grace to me? 3. How does my sinfulness and God's graciousness change the way I think and act everyday?

**Colossians:** How big is God? So big he rescues people from the dominion of darkness and brings them into the kingdom of the Son he loves, in whom everyone can have redemption, the forgiveness of sins...everyone! Jesus is the very visible image of the invisible spirit we name God. As God's son, Jesus Christ is the One through whom all things were created in heaven or on earth, be they invisible spirits or very visible physical matter. He is before all things, and in him all things have their being and hold together. He is the head of his living body, alive and at work in the world, which is the church, the people he has redeemed and called together to carry on...and carry out...his work. In him the very fullness of God dwells. In him God is reconciling to himself all things, making peace with everyone through his blood. Are you reconciled to God? Are you at peace? Have you been transferred from the dominion of darkness into his gentle and glorious kingdom? Blessed are you! You are his body, for he is alive in you! **Questions:** 1. If all the fullness of God dwells in him, and I am in him, what does that say about the gracious

gift of God to me? How does knowing that all the fullness of God in Christ is at work, in me and through me, change my attitude and actions? 2. Do I make time to meditate on the perfections of Christ, his all-knowing wisdom, his almighty power, his amazing love and forgiveness? Do I praise, worship, and love him for them in my prayers often? 3. What was I like when I was under the dominion of darkness, and what was the quality of my life then? What is the difference in my character and quality of life now that he has transferred me into the kingdom of his Son, now that I have redemption and the gracious forgiveness of all my sins through trusting him?

**Prayer:** God, our Father, thank you for reconciling us to you through the blood of your Son. Thank you for delivering me from the dominion of darkness and transferring me into the kingdom of your Son. I confess complicity with the darkness. I confess the shadows still loom in the corners, even though in Christ I am your new creation. Make Christ to rise more in me day by day, and dispel the darkness more and more. As you were reconciling the whole world to you through him....as you reconciled me to you through him...so use me to reconcile others to him. As you, Father, were pleased to have all your fullness dwell in him, so be pleased to make all his fullness dwell in me and work through me, to reconcile everyone I know to you. All glory and honor, all worship and praise, be yours, together with your Son, Jesus Christ, in the power and unity of the Holy Spirit, now and forever! Amen.

**Day 278.** Read Jeremiah 4.19-6.14; Colossians 1.21-2.7; Psalm 77.1-20; and Proverbs 23-25.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** Writhing in pain from anguish, heart pounding....who is it Jeremiah is describing? Himself or...God? Or both? The reason: 'I have heard the sound of the trumpet and battle cry.' Disaster after disaster until the whole land lies in ruin. Is it a vision the prophet sees....or is it God seeing the future, which is the eternal now he dwells in always. It is God who speaks for himself through the prophet, who shares the same pain because he bears the message. 'Go up and down the streets of Jerusalem and see if you can find even one person who seeks the truth and deals honestly,' God says, 'and I will forgive this city.' Leaders and laity alike have gone astray. Their ears are stopped, so they cannot hear the Word of the Lord; because it is offensive and arduous to them. From the least to the greatest of them, all are greedy for gain. Even priests and prophets practice deceit, proclaiming peace, and declaring that the wound of the people is not serious, when it is deadly indeed. In the midst of the destruction and desolation, hope still glimmers...hope from the faithful God. 'Yet even in these days of unfaithfulness,' God declares, 'I will not destroy you completely.' God will glean a remnant, like someone gleaning grapes. One day centuries later, that righteous One, the person God was looking for among his people

will come; and God will forgive their sins for his sake. **Questions:** 1. How do people proclaim a false peace or security today? In what other ways, than trusting in God (like wealth or possessions), do I seek security? 2. What difficulties and disasters have I faced (or am I facing) in life that God used to turn me to him in deeper trust and devotion? 3. In what ways do I need to 'seek the truth and deal honestly' in my life situation today? What steps will I take to 'seek the truth?' In what ways, specifically, do I need to 'deal honestly' in my family, workplace, faith community, and community in general?

**Colossians:** Alien. That's who I was. That's who all people are until reconciled to God through the death of his Son, Jesus Christ. In God's sight, because of Christ's cross, I am without blemish and totally free from accusation, if I live in faith, firmly established in the hope given me by the gospel. In this hope we stand, all because God extended this hope through servants appointed like Paul to present the Word of God in its fullness to us and reveal to us the mystery hidden for ages, but now disclosed to all who believe. The mystery—the astounding reality—is Christ! Christ in us, the hope of glory. Christ in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge in the world. Christ in me! Christ in everyone who believes! The call of God...and Paul...to me is to live in Christ, rooted and built up in him, strong in faith, and overflowing with thankfulness in word and deed. Christ in me, the hope...and the beginning...of glory!. **Questions:** 1. How rooted and grounded in Christ am I? Lightly \_\_\_\_\_ Moderately \_\_\_\_\_ Solidly \_\_\_\_\_. 2. If all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are in Christ, what can (and will) I do to go 'treasure hunting' and to be more solidly rooted in Christ? 3. How does the reality that through faith in Christ I am already 'without blemish or accusation' affect my attitudes and actions? Do I live with greater joy, generosity, and confidence because I am already forgiven and freed in Christ; or do I live weakly, with uncertainty and shame, not knowing the hope that is already mine in Christ? Why?

**Prayer:** God, you declare me without blemish and free from any accusation because of Christ's cross. Help me to trust your word of promise totally. Loosen me from the evil one's accusations that ring and echo inside me, like footsteps in a dark corridor. He tells me I am an alien, forever a foreigner to your love. You say I am free, because your Son paid the cost with his cross. I will stand in his righteousness alone, trusting the truth that his sacrifice made me yours forever. He will always be my only treasure, my wisdom and knowledge. Root me so strongly in him that none of the storms of life, or the struggles brought on by the evil one, can tear me free from Christ and his cross. That is the Tree whose roots go so deep, nothing can topple it. Amen.

**Day 279.** Read Jeremiah 6.15-8.7; Colossians 2.8-23;  
Psalm 78.1-31; and Proverbs 24.26.

**Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:**

**Jeremiah:** Bird-brained! No shame at all. Not even a blush for my wrongful conduct. In fact, more often than not, I seek to justify it or cover it up-often with religious rituals to assuage any sense of shame! 'Stand at the crossroads and look for the ancient paths, the good way, and walk in it,' God calls through Jeremiah, his prophet. He doesn't care about the 'incense' of religious ritual to mask the smell of wrongdoing. Every moment is like standing at a crossroads, with a choice to make. God calls: 'Find the good way and walk in it!' Don't go your own way and then whitewash it with religious acts. 'Do not trust in deceptive words,' claiming the protection of 'The Temple of the Lord, The Temple of the Lord!', as if that will deliver you. Go look at the temple in Shiloh that people trusted in to cover their dishonest, uncaring actions. It lies in ruins, mimicking the lives of those who 'worshipped' there. The real way to life is to change your ways and actions. Deal with people justly. Protect the foreigner, the widow, and orphan in your midst. Do seek security in things that cannot give life, putting them in place of trust in God alone. Birds know instinctively the time and route of their migration; yet, each human being pursues his or her own course, not following the will and way of God, which is life itself. Left to ourselves, we are worse than bird-brained! **Questions:** 1. Do I use religious ritual to avoid changing my ways? 2. What do I need to do to help the needy, deal justly with people, and get rid of false securities (false gods) in my life? 3. Whenever I do wrong, am I aware of my tendency to justify the actions in my mind? What are the mental gymnastics I go through to try to justify and excuse my wrongful actions or inaction?

**Colossians:** Will I be captive or free? Truly, there are those who would take me captive through hollow, human words and ways. In Christ alone does all the fullness of God live in bodily form. In him alone—when I am at last captive to him—will I be free. If I fall to the world's ways, it's my own fault. And all too often I am just like the animal that walks willingly into the trap, only to have it spring upon me suddenly. Why am I still so surprised when I am caught? I chose it! But being trapped is no longer my fate. Believing, being baptized into Christ, I am freed. His fullness has met my emptiness and freed me from the sorrow and fear I have lived, like an animal caught in a trap. The trap has been opened to let me go free. I will not let anyone trap me again. I will see to it that no one takes me captive again to hollow, human words and ways. In him, the fullness of God dwells bodily. He alone will fill me with life. **Questions:** 1. What human or worldly philosophies or traditions have taken me captive and kept me from the full freedom of Christ-like life, as a true child of God? 2. How have I settled in the past for 'religion' (human rules and rituals) instead of real relationship with God through Jesus Christ? 3. Do I make time frequently to meditate on Christ Jesus and the astounding reality that 'all the fullness of God' lives in him? Do I pour out frequently in prayer my love and dedication to Christ, as the awesome sovereign of my life?

**Prayer:** It's my own fault, isn't it, Lord. My own fault if I fall. My own fault if I let someone take me captive through hollow and deceptive words. Shame on them, but even more, shame on me. It's my fault, because more often than not, I want to believe the lies...I choose to go down that road. In Christ, your Son, all fullness dwells. Life at

its source lies in him alone. In him, I am given that fullness. I was dead in my sins, but you made me alive in him. In baptism I was buried with him; and in baptism, as I passed through the waters, I was raised to life in him. All my sin and wrongdoing is gone-nailed to his cross. No more straining to cover up or justify my misdeeds. Now I can walk in the new way...with the one who is the Way. No more striving to cover over my shameful Self with religious rituals and righteous justifications that were hollow and false. I am free to worship truly—to love and adore and follow you! At every moment, every crossroad's intersection of time and choice, let me find and follow the Way.  
.Amen.

**Day 280.** Read Jeremiah 8.8-9.26; Colossians 3.1-17;  
Psalm 78.32-55; and Proverbs 24.27.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** Just scratches! Mere flesh wounds! So the leaders—the learned scribes, and even the priests and prophets—say. “Peace, Peace!” they proclaim, when there is no real peace. The illness is terminal. The people hoped for a peace and looked for a time of healing, but only terror came. They are crushed and God....is crushed with them. ‘Since my people are crushed, I am crushed with them; I mourn and horror grips me,’ God declares. Is there no healing balm in Gilead, no physician to heal the wound of God’s mortally ill children? There is indeed. But no one human. God is the healer. ‘Let not the wise man boast in his wisdom or the strong man in his strength, or the rich in his riches; but let everyone boast about this alone: ‘ that they understand and know me,’ says God. Healing lies in God alone, who alone exercises kindness and justice and righteousness in the earth. But how is one to know and understand God? Again and again the refrain that reveals the way echoes in Jeremiah’s words: The Lord says... You will know and understand God, as he reveals himself in his Word. Boast in his Word! **Questions:** 1. What kind of false assurances and securities does the world offer me? Which ones have I fallen for, while seeking ignorantly for the true peace that comes only from God? 2. How has knowing God brought me healing? Peace? 3. How does it affect my attitudes and actions to know that whenever I am crushed, God literally suffers with me and is crushed, too? How does knowing a God who suffers with suffering people change my own attitude and actions toward sufferers, even those who suffer because of their own wrongful actions (as I do often)?

**Colossians:** Alive again! Forever free! All who believed have been raised with Christ! What is left to do but set my heart and mind on my destination and destiny: above with Christ, seated at the right hand of God? No more eyes lowered to earth, looking out for my own benefit and wellbeing, ignoring others and inflicting on them my needs. I have died and come back to life in Christ. My new life is hidden in heaven with Christ. The

life he now lives face- to- face with God will be mine—already is mine by promise. What is left for me to do? Put to death what is worldly in me, the old Self with all its self-serving, destructive, deadly practices. I am to be my own executioner, through daily repentance. What’s left for me to do? Die to sin and rise to newness of life in Christ every day, letting the peace of Christ rise in me and the word of Christ rule in me, doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, and becoming a living thanksgiving to God, together with all the people of God who daily are dying to self and rising to live with Christ, like me.

**Questions:** 1. Do I live like a person who has died and come back to life (even eternal life)? Do my words and actions reflect the joy, generosity, and gratitude of one who has come back to life? 2. What still needs to be put to death in me? What areas and aspects of my life and Self need to die, so Christ can have full control of all my thoughts, words, and actions? 3. Do I make time to pray and meditate on Christ, to study God’s Word, and to participate in God’s community of faith, so my thoughts and actions are set ‘above’ –on heavenly rather than earthly things?

**Prayer:** Why do I keep my eyes lowered to earth still? The grave has released me at your command, O Christ. Sin has fled, and my Accuser has stopped. Why do I still lower my gaze to earth so often, looking and longing for something to sustain my Self, instead of raising it to you and the land where I belong? Lift my gaze to God again, O Holy Spirit, whenever I falter. Let die within me every longing that leads again to slavery and death. Life is mine now as your gift; so let me live always toward you, for you, in you. And if my gaze goes again to earth, let it also be like yours: looking and longing always to lift someone up. Amen.

## Through The Bible In One Year: Week 40

### Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Jeremiah 1.4-10

Psalm: 73.21-28

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Philippians 4.4-13

Theme: A ‘Can Do’ Faith In A ‘Can’t Do’ World

#### Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 40:

Can we not just survive day by day but, in point of fact, prevail over the chaos? Modern life in modern society is simply impossible, with all its pressure-cooker complications and strictures. In truth, joyful and free life in this fallen world has always been...and will always be...unmanageable and impossible without a ‘can do’ faith. Even

Jeremiah, when called on by God to take on a world-changing role as a prophet and proclaimer of God's Word, balked declaring, 'I am just a youth.' Paul himself had experienced abundance and poverty and even persecution; and, yet, he learned the 'secret' of a contentment and peace that passes all human understanding. This is the peace we all long for deep within our souls. This peace is available to everyone right now. Paul says confidently, "I can do all things through him who strengthens me." As Jeremiah experienced the call of God and received from God the strength he needed to carry out his difficult mission in this contrary world, so Paul found the source of strength and contentment in Jesus Christ himself. His strong, personal relationship with Christ was his anchor in the storm and his compass to find direction in this directionless world. Peace and contentment are within everyone's grasp right now, if only they will grasp Christ's outstretched hand in faith and following.

#### Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **"Beware the Quicksand of Religion."** Through Jeremiah, God warns the Old Testament people of God not to trust in their outward show of religion, or the external trappings of religion like the Temple, in which they placed inordinate trust. Instead, he calls them to turn toward a real relationship with him that is reflected in real justice and compassion toward others. So also, centuries later, Paul warns the Colossian Christians about false teachers who for self-gain would lead them astray, calling them instead to cling to the truth of God's Word and way in Christ. Jeremiah 7.3-14; Psalm 77.1-12; Colossians 2.8-18.
2. **"A New People For A New World."** Our world is dying and everyone in it. Isaiah, the prophet, spoke to people that were oppressed and near destruction. In the darkness he proclaimed that God would make a new creation, with a new heaven and a new earth. With the death and resurrection of Christ, God has begun making a new humanity, with Christ himself as the firstborn of many sons and daughters to follow. All who are in Christ are called and empowered now to be transformed into new beings, created in the image and likeness of Christ. All who believe, therefore, are to be signs themselves of the new creation God has begun and will one day make complete,, as at the end of time he ushers in the new heaven and earth Isaiah foretold. Isaiah 65.17-25; Psalm 78.51-55; Colossians 3.1-14.