

# Through The Bible In One Year

## The Adventure of Many Lifetimes

Unpublished Work, December 2005, David W. Shockey.

## Daily Devotional Companion

### Week 41

**Day 281.** Read Jeremiah 10.1-11.23; Colossians 3.18-4.18; Psalm 78.56-72; and Proverbs 24.28-29.

### Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** Scarecrows in a melon patch. Mere semblances of reality, fit only for fooling creatures of lesser intelligence. So God describes the idol made by the nations. They only mimic the Living God, as scarecrows mimic people, only appearing to be personal, spiritual beings with special powers. They cannot speak; they cannot move about on their own. There is really no need to fear them; for they cannot do any good...or harm. No harm, that is, if you don't follow them. So God says to his people through his prophet, Jeremiah, 'Don't learn the way of the nations.' Following their ways instead of the Living God's, leads ultimately to destruction. That is why God is a 'jealous' God. That is why God will not quietly and complacently allow anyone to make idols or follow them without consequences. 'Obey me and do everything I command you,' God calls to us, 'and you will be my people; and I will be your God.' For those who accept covenant relationship with him, they will enjoy life as it was intended from the beginning of creation, life in a garden, like land flowing with milk and honey, with every blessing God can bestow. But his people have followed other gods. Like a desperate parent struggling to discover some way to win back lost children, God even commands Jeremiah, 'Do not pray for this people or plead for them, because I will not listen to their call during their distress.' God seeks a true repentance, a persistent turning toward him with the whole heart, not a mere momentary commitment made in the crisis. He wants real people in a real relationship, not just scarecrows. **Questions:** 1. What keeps me from entering into a deeper, more intimate, personal relationship with God? 2. How have I been like a scarecrow in my relationship with God, more semblance than reality? 3. What people or things do I tend to give as much importance to as God in my life? What have I lifted up to rival God in importance and priority in my life?

**Colossians:** Through Christ, that is the key. Everything is through Christ. In this community everyone is mutually accountable, because all are related to one another through Christ himself. Christ comes between. Wives submit to their husbands, and husbands love their wives, in no way being harsh to them. Children are to obey parents, and fathers are not to provoke them so as to embitter or discourage their characters. Slaves

are to obey their masters, not only when being watched but with sincerity of heart. Masters are to be just and fair, providing for their needs. In God's community, every work is to be done for the Lord himself, not for others, and especially not for myself. When we serve others...spouse, child, overseer or subordinate, it is the Lord Christ we are serving.

**Questions:** 1. How does my home life change when all my interactions with my family are done consciously and primarily for the Lord and not for my family members? How does it change my work on the job, when I do all for him, and not my boss or fellow workers? Does it help me to better handle ingratitude or correction? 2. How does it change my words and actions with others when I imagine that Christ is always standing right beside us, or what is better, between us? 3. Do I treat my spouse, family members, fellow workers and neighbors fairly and lovingly, as Christ does me? What relationship needs work? What practical step will I take this week to improve that relationship?

**Prayer:** Lord Jesus, I pray you will come between me and all the people around me. No, I don't mean that my relationship with you would make me neglect or forget them. That is not what you want. That does not bring joy to your heart. I pray you will stand between me and everyone I meet this day, so that as I look at them and speak to them and act toward them, you will be between us so all my words and actions pass through you first. I know that will increase your cross, my Lord; because, when I am cross, I will hurl hurtful words and do painful deeds toward them. If you are between us, they will fall on you first. But that is why you went to the cross, after all. To come between me and the punishment I deserve for doing such deeds. I only pray that, with you between, my words and deeds will become gentler and kinder, so you experience my love for you, instead of new nails and thorns. Amen.

**Day 282.** Read Jeremiah 12.1-14.10; 1 Thessalonians 1.1-29; Psalm 79.1-13; and Proverbs 24.30-34.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** Sow wheat and reap thorns. Wear yourself out but gain nothing. Such is life apart from...life lived in a direction away from...God. Judah experienced a drought that symbolically depicted their spiritual state: dry and dying. In the midst of the deadly dryness rises a repentant cry. Though our backsliding is great, though our sins testify against us, do something, God, for the sake of your own name. Do not be like a stranger traveling in the land, who stays but one night and moves on. Do not be like a warrior who is powerless to save. You are among us, God; do not forsake us.' And God's response to their cry is, 'I will remember.' He will remember their wickedness and punish their sins. Thank God, God will remember and not pass on, like a stranger just traveling through the land, who stays one night and moves on, forgetting. **Questions:** 1. When I commit sins and the consequences come, do I turn to God just to avoid the consequences and not really to change my character and actions? 2. Am I actually thankful when God

'remembers' my sins and punishes them (gives me consequences), or do I receive correction grudgingly? 3. How do I respond when I see others who don't seem to suffer consequences for the injustice and wrong they do, while I do? Do I pray for them?

**Thessalonians:** It is certain. They are chosen. The certainty of their chosen-ness can be seen by the effects being chosen caused. The good news of Christ, that in the cross and resurrection of Jesus, they have been chosen to receive new life, came to them not merely with words but with power, with the Spirit and with deep life-changing conviction. Welcoming the message of Paul, in spite of severe suffering, they became imitators of him, living the new life he lived, despite his own severe suffering. He worked night and day so he would not be a burden to them...so the good news would be presented to them free. He shared not just the good news of life in Christ, but his very self, his very life; because Paul loved them so. As their chosen-ness changed their lives, despite their sufferings for Christ, and in fact because of it, they themselves became models for all believers. They had turned from the safety of serving idols to serve the true and living God. They were chosen, and it changed them so that they changed the lives of others. **Questions:** 1. Does my life reflect the same joy and power, the same Spirit, of the Thessalonians? 2. Do I really believe and comprehend the reality that in Christ I have been chosen by the Living God? How does that change my attitudes and actions? 3. To whom am I serving as a model of faith and following of Jesus Christ? Who, for good or ill, am I influencing?

**Prayer:** You are the true and living God. You have chosen to come into my life and make me yours. I want no other. I have no other. I will follow no other. You have chosen me, out of your great love, and now, loving you, I choose you. Always and forever, you are the true and living God. Amen.

**Day 283.** Read Jeremiah 14.11-16.15; 1 Thessalonians 2.10-3.13; Psalm 80.1-19; and Proverbs 25.1-5.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** God forbids Jeremiah to pray for the well-being of his wayward people. Even though they fast and give their offerings—even though they do everything right religiously—God declares he will neither listen to their prayers nor accept them. Their conduct has become so far from what God wants, God declares that even if Moses and Samuel stood before him pleading for the people, his heart would not go out to them. God tells Jeremiah not even to marry and have children among these people, nor even to go where there is a funeral to show sympathy, because he has withdrawn his blessing, his love and pity from his people! Even so, Jeremiah does plead for the well-being of God's wayward people. Jeremiah reminds God of a reason the people pretend to be religious but don't follow God's ways. He offers an excuse that, at least, helps explain their waywardness. They haven't been warned. The prophets have been telling them lies, saying that God himself

said they will not suffer sword or famine, that they will have lasting peace. Jeremiah himself has proclaimed God's word of judgment and warning to them...and has suffered for it. Jeremiah describes how he sat alone because God's hand was on him, never partaking in the merriment of others. Unlike the false prophets, Jeremiah suffered reproach for following God. His intense suffering causes him to question his calling and even the God who called him. He himself cries out to God asking why his pain is unending, and why God seems like a spring of water that fails. God answers, 'If you speak worthy, not worthless words, you will be my spokesman, Jeremiah.' God promises, 'I will make you a fortified wall of bronze to this people, who will fight against you but not overcome you.' The reason is simple: 'I am with you to rescue and save you,' God promises. God renews his initial call to Jeremiah and his promise of his presence and deliverance. Jeremiah's message from God sounds so harsh: God has removed his blessing because their ancestors sinned by forsaking God and following false gods; and they themselves have behaved even worse, stubbornly following their own, evil hearts instead of obeying God. That is why disaster has come on them. Yet, in the deepest darkness, God's mercy still shines through. God declares to them, as they are about to be carried away captive to foreign lands far away in the north, 'the days are coming when they will swear saying, 'As surely as the Lord lives who brought us up out of the land of the north and all the countries where he banished us.' God promises a new exodus, like the deliverance one their ancestors knew from slavery in Egypt. **Questions:** 1. Who is the most mature, spiritual counselor and faith confidant I have? Does that person tell me what I want to hear, or what I need to hear? 2. What causes me to feel that my pain is unbearable and to doubt God's reliability to deliver me? Do I share those things with my spiritual counselor? Do I pour out my feelings, questions, and doubts to God honestly in prayer? 3. Do I tend to tell others what they need to hear from God, or what they want to hear? What kind of a spokesperson for God am I?

**Thessalonians:** Why would they ever want to follow what Paul had told them? He kept telling them they would suffer persecution for following Christ, and they did. Yet, when they accepted the word they heard from Paul, they received it not as the word of men but as what it really was: the veritable word of God. Perhaps it was because he told them straight out what to expect, without compromise or disguise, that they recognized his words as God's Word. Now they are standing firm, though facing persecution; and Paul himself derives strength from their example. Night and day he prays to see them again and to supply what might be lacking in their faith. 'May the Lord increase your love, so you overflow with love for each other and everyone around you,' Paul prays, 'just as my love does for you!' **Questions:** 1. Is my love increasing? Is my love overflowing for my faith community members? Is my love overflowing for all others where I live and work every day? 2. When I face difficulties or rejection for my faith, do I take it in stride; or am I surprised and dejected because of it? Why? 3. Do I listen to the proclamation in my faith community as the word of God, expecting God to use the leaders like Paul as his human instruments to communicate with me? Do I read the Bible that way? How does doing so change my life?

Prayer: Lord, there are false teachers everywhere. But there are also true ones. Let me look to your written word to guide me in knowing the difference and distinguish between them. Your Word is still at work here in this world. Open my eyes and ears to recognize you speaking to me, and help me to put into practice all that you ask of me. Let me overflow with your love for everyone around me, which also means speaking and enacting your word for them. Amen.

**Day 284.** Read Jeremiah 16.16-18.23; 1 Thessalonians 4.1-5.3; Psalm 81.1-16; and Proverbs 25.6-7.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** ‘The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure; who can fathom it?’ says the one who created the heart. God alone does what no one else can: he searches the heart and examines the mind, to reward everyone according to their conduct—what their deeds deserve. The one who trusts in human wisdom and strength will become like one dwelling in desert places, where no one else lives. They will be like a stunted bush in a wasteland. The one who trusts in the Lord will be like a tree planted beside a stream, enduring the drought, always bearing fruit. Why would anyone choose a different god...one which is really no god? The human heart is a mystery only God can fathom. In order to turn them to him and to life, God turns away. ‘I will enslave you to your enemies in a land you don’t even know,’ God tells his wayward people. ‘I will show them my back and not my face in the time of disaster,’ God declares. God longs desperately to turn them back. Jeremiah speaks for the people when he cries out to God, ‘Heal me, O Lord, and I will know true healing; save me and I will be saved indeed, for you are the One I worship.’ God sends him to Jerusalem to speak a message to the people, even though they did not listen in the past. If they turn and obey, God promises they will live in their own land, ruled by their own leaders. God sends Jeremiah to a potter’s house and there speaks to him. Can a potter not do what he wants with his own creation? How much more God with his own people? ‘I am preparing disaster for you,’ God declares., ‘So turn from your evil ways, each of you, and live.’ Even so, God knows the human heart and mind. Many will say, ‘We will continue with our own plans, and follow our own heart.’ The selfish, human heart is deceitful, above all things. **Questions:** 1. How in my life have I followed my own selfish desires to the hurt of others and even myself? 2. How has God’s severity toward me at those times, shown in the consequences that came for me, actually been a sign of his grace and kindness to me? 3. Whom do I know who is going down a dangerous path away from God? How can I be God’s instrument to help them discover the way to life, even as Jeremiah was God’s instrument for Judah’s salvation?

**Thessalonians:** It will be like flying, only without an airplane, or even wings. One day the Lord will come down from heaven, with the blast of a trumpet; and the dead in Christ will rise first, and all in Christ who are alive at that moment will be caught up with them to

meet Christ in the air. Encourage one another with that thought, Paul says! Who wouldn't want to share in that awesome experience, the great gathering in the air?! But in the meantime, Paul's thoughts are totally 'down to earth.' He writes to the Thessalonian Christ-followers about 'how to live so that you please God.' Each should learn to control his or her own body in a holy and honorable way, not in passionate lust like those who do not know God and, therefore, could care less about pleasing God. God calls people to live a holy life—a life which has as its aim pleasing God- in every aspect of life. Every follower of Jesus makes it their ambition to lead a peaceable life—literally, a 'peace-able' life-working with their hands so as not to be a burden on others, overflowing with love, to win the respect of outsiders. The excitement and anticipation of the Lord's coming, when joined with the practical, daily love overflowing from a life that seeks in every way to give God joy, will win the respect of outsiders. It must. And those who are 'outsiders' may then be drawn to become 'insiders,' people who will meet Jesus in the clouds on the last day.

**Questions:** 1. How do 'outsiders' (those who do not know, love, and follow Jesus Christ) view my life? Are they attracted or turned off by what they see in me? 2. Have I ever taken time to meditate on what it will be like to meet Jesus face- to- face on the last day or be caught up with him in the air? How will doing so change my excitement and joy in life? 3. What can I do to lead a more peaceable life, overflowing more with the love and peace of God for others?

**Prayer:** Lord, let me live a down-to-earth life, while I am anticipating being caught up with you into the clouds. Let me follow you truly, for you first came to earth to serve and later were glorified. Forgive me that I want to be glorified without first getting dirty by stooping to serve. Let me look lower. Let my eyes and hands always be open and active here on earth, seeking someone to serve, just as you served. May someone else be lifted by my stooping to serve, even as you have lifted me up by stooping so low as to come where I had fallen. All praise and glory for your love, which lifts up by bending low! Amen.

**Day 285.** Read Jeremiah 19.1-21.14; 1 Thessalonians 5.4-28; Psalm 82.1-8; and Proverbs 25.8-10.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** In this valley children were sacrificed by fire, something God never demanded, desired, nor even imagined. The people dreamed it up themselves. It was the product of human imagination, human religion, rather than anything growing out of true relationship with the Living God. So, God sends Jeremiah to proclaim the coming destruction of that place and of the people who did such abominable things—quite literally inhuman things, which is what the word 'ab~homin~able' means in its Latin derivation. He is instructed to buy a clay pot, proclaim God's Word of judgment, and then break the pot before his hearers as a visible sign of what God will do...if they do not change their ways. Their

children are dying for their misdeeds. Now the people will die for their own, God declares. Jeremiah obediently proclaims the coming judgment in the very precincts of God's temple. For doing so, he is beaten and put in stocks as a public spectacle. In the midst of his suffering Jeremiah cries out to God, accusing God of deceiving him. Proclaiming the Word of God has brought him insult and reproaches. But if he tries to hold in the word which God gives him to proclaim, his heart feels like it is burning and he cannot. Jeremiah, suffering from self-pity, even curses the day he was born and questions why he had to see so much trouble and sorrow. God, out of his limitless love, will listen to everything his servants say. In the end, Jeremiah remembers the promise of God to be with him and deliver him that God gave him when he called him. 'The Lord is with me like a mighty warrior,' he declares, 'so my persecutors will be overcome and not conquer.' So is everyone who trusts in God and is obedient to do his will. **Questions:** 1. How have I hurt others, even the people nearest and dearest to me, in my self-centered attempts to secure myself and the kind of life I want? 2. When God asks me to do something difficult, do I do it without complaint, do it and complain afterwards, or not do it at all? Why? 3. Do I believe God is with me like a mighty warrior? How does it (or would it) change my attitudes and actions to believe God is with me, with power to deliver?

**Thessalonians:** Children of the light and of the day now, though once we were darkness itself. Day and light people are awake during the day. Darkness is the time for sleep. So Paul urges God's people to be alert and self-controlled, like soldiers ready for battle. Faith and love are the breast plate that protects the heart; the hope of salvation is the helmet that protects the mind. And like good soldiers, the followers of Christ are to care for their comrades in arms, encouraging and building one another up. We are to respect those who work hard among us, especially those whom God places over us and who lead us. Because of their work on our behalf, we are to hold them in the highest regard and love. As people of the day and part of the team - warn the idle, encourage the fearful, strengthen and help the weak, and be patient with everyone; for everyone is a work in progress. Be joyful always, pray constantly, and give thanks in every circumstance. Paul's prayer is that God will sanctify them completely so their whole being - body, soul, and spirit - will be perfect and blameless when they stand before Jesus. The one who calls us, and who is working in us and through us, is totally trustworthy. He will keep his promise. He will do it. For one day all children of the day and of the light will be completely light, even as he is light! **Questions:** 1. How is my 'light factor' right now? Am I more like dawn, noonday, evening, sunset, or night? Why? What will help me grow in the light? 2. How active and positive a part am I of my faith community? Do I encourage, strengthen, admonish others patiently and lovingly? Do I respect and support the leaders of my faith community as I ought? What more could I do or do better? 3. How joyful, prayerful, thankful am I? What gets in the way of my being so continually? What will I do about it?

**Prayer:** How dark was my darkness, Lord! I didn't even suspect. I couldn't even see a tenth part. I still don't see the whole of it. You are so kind as to reveal my blindness to me gradually. Thank you for making this child of darkness your own child, a child of light and of the day. Dispel more and more in me the shadowy deeds of darkness that

still linger. They are not who I now am by your grace. Lord Jesus, rise more and more in me like the sun rises at dawn, dispelling the darkness, until the last day comes when I will be wholly light like you. May all my words and deeds be done in your sight and for your glory, bringing you joy and honor. Amen.

**Day 286.** Read Jeremiah 22.1-23.20; 2 Thessalonians 1.1-12; Psalm 83.1-18; and Proverbs 25.11-14.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** Go right to the palace of the king and command him, ‘Do what is right and just—don’t wrong the alien, the fatherless, the widow, or shed innocent blood! God gave that extremely difficult, even dangerous, assignment to Jeremiah. God’s anger was directed to the leaders, to the very top. ‘Woe to the shepherds who are destroying the sheep of my pasture!’ God warns. Even prophets and priests are guilty. The prophets proclaim visions of their own and their own words, not God’s. Prophet, priest, and king alike go their own way. Their injustice provoked God’s anger. Their punishment is coming. Captivity and exile are coming. And their injustices provoke another, even more awesome, response from God: God himself will intervene. God himself will gather the sheep that have been scattered. God will place over the people shepherds who tend and care for them, so that they dwell in safety, free from fear. God himself will raise up from the line of David one to shepherd Israel in righteousness. In his day Judah will be saved and Israel will dwell in safety. Because of the redemption that God will send through him, the redeemed people will swear not by the Lord who brought us up out of Egypt, but by the God who brought God’s people out of all the countries where he banished them. **Questions:** 1. In my leadership roles in my family, workplace, community, and especially my faith community, am I leading in a just and kind way that honors God and serves the good of people? What areas do I need to improve? 2. How does the fact that, centuries before Jesus said, ‘I am the Good Shepherd,’ God prophesied the coming of a good shepherd who would gather and redeem them, affect your faith and following of Jesus? How does the prophesy and fulfillment of the Bible strengthen your faith and witness? 3. Are there leaders I have, perhaps even in my faith community, that I need to talk with about shortcomings in their leadership? How can I do so in a Christ-like way that shows real caring and builds them up?

**2 Thessalonians:** Wouldn’t you like to meet them...talk to them...get to know them...be like them? Paul actually boasts about these Christ-followers in Thessalonica! He boasts to other churches about them because their faith and love are growing continually. He boasts because in the midst of sore trials and persecutions, their perseverance and faith are shining brightly. One day God will pay back trouble to those who are troubling the faithful in Thessalonica and give relief to them. On that day Jesus will be revealed from heaven in blazing fire with a host of mighty angels, to be glorified in his people. He already

is being glorified in and through the believers of Thessalonica. Already they shine with Christ's living presence. Paul's prayer is that God, by his power, will fulfill every good purpose and every act motivated by their faith and following of Jesus Christ. That is the way God is glorified in a person. That is the way a person is glorified in Jesus Christ.

**Questions:** 1. Is my faith growing more and more? Is my love? How? 2. What do I think Jesus' second coming will be like? How does that affect my attitudes and actions right now? 3. How is God being glorified in me?

**Prayer:** God, be glorified in me. Help me persevere faithfully in my trials. Help me grow in faith and love more and more. I know it is only through trials that faith and love grow stronger, so strengthen me in the trials that come. Strengthen my love, especially for the people who cause my trials. Let me respond in love to those who ridicule or reject me. Lord, be glorified in me; and glorify me in you, by making me more like you. True glory is to be like you. Amen.

**Day 287.** Read Jeremiah 23.21-25.38; 2 Thessalonians 2.1-17; Psalm 84.1-12; and Proverbs 25.15.

## Thoughts & Questions For Reflection:

**Jeremiah:** Is God just a God nearby, and not far away? Does he not fill heaven and earth both? Can anyone hide anything from his sight? God has heard the false prophets who tell their own dreams, as if they were visions given them by God. What has straw to do with grain? God's word is like fire. God's word is like a hammer that can break rocks. God's word has power. God's word changes the reality in which it is spoken. The only thing the word of the false prophets does is to cause God's people to forget his name...to weaken the vital, personal relationship, so they can no longer hear his voice and, finally, forget even who he is. God's judgment is a fitting response: 'Therefore, I will surely forget you and cast you out from my presence into captivity in a foreign country. And yet...even though they had forgotten his name...God will watch over them for good and not just for judgment. Jeremiah is given a vision from God of two bowls of figs, one beautiful, the other bad. God promises he will watch over the exiles of Judah, 'for good,' just like someone watching over a basket of good fruit, savoring them. He promises to bring them back and plant them again in the land and not uproot them, to build them up and not tear them down. 'I will give them a new heart to know me,' God promises, 'so they will be my people and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart.' For twenty-three years Jeremiah had prophesied of the coming destruction, to turn the people back to God. Finally, it comes upon them. But just then, in the execution of judgment, God's grace shines forth. Jeremiah prophesies God's promise that the exile will last just seventy years. Then God will keep his promise and bring them back, to plant them again and build them up once more. **Questions:** 1. What does it do to me to know that God is watching eagerly over me, personally, every moment to plant me and build me up, just as

he did the people of Judah during their exile? That, despite my fallen-ness God still loves me and wants me to succeed in achieving the life he dreams for me? 2. How does it affect my attitudes and actions to know that the God who created the universe wants me to know him and have a personal relationship with him? 3. How far along am I toward having that new heart—the heart of Christ—that God promises those who believe in him?

**2 Thessalonians:** Did I miss out? Jesus said he would come again. Has he already come? Did he forget me...or worse, not want me? Some false teachers were troubling the Christ-followers of Thessalonica by saying Christ had already come. That day will not come, Paul says, before a great rebellion breaks out in the world. There will be counterfeit signs and wonders that will delude many and deceive those who are perishing. But God has called his people to be saved through the working of his sanctifying Spirit and the truth they have received. They have been called to share themselves, personally, in the very glory of Jesus Christ. They only must stand firm in the truth the apostles—the people who know and proclaim Jesus- passed on by word of mouth or letter. Their message is: stand firm, rooted in the truth of Jesus Christ. **Questions:** 1. How well- rooted and firm am I in the faith passed down by the apostles? 2. How faithfully do I study the scriptures and know God's Word, the One who is 'the Way, the Truth, and the Life?' 3. What will help make me less susceptible to counterfeit religion and false teachings?

**Prayer:** What is this gift you are giving me, gracious God? A new heart?! How did you know that was what I really need most? How did you know that is what I really want most? A new heart...like yours. Take this old one. It no longer beats strong and true. Give me the heart of Christ...form in me the character of Christ your son...and I will really be new. And then...only then...will I act new...for you. Amen.

## Through The Bible In One Year: Week 41

### Sunday Worship Lessons

First Lesson (Old Testament): Jeremiah 16.19-21

Psalm: 77.10-15

Second (New Testament) Lesson: Colossians 3.18-4.6

Theme: The Best Teacher You Will Ever Have

#### Sunday Scripture Selection and Theme Explanation, Week 41:

How should we think and act where we work and live every day? Is there a compass to direct us, to give us an unflinching direction to steer toward? Can anyone show us the way, teaching us how we can live the life we long for deep in our being? Jeremiah proclaims a

prophecy of a day when God himself will teach people—not just his Old Testament chosen people, but all the ‘nations,’—people of all races and cultures. After Jesus Christ came, died, and rose again, Paul proclaims to all people—husbands and wives, parents and children, slaves and masters—a surprisingly simple principle by which all can find the way in every situation: “Whatever you do, do it with all your heart, as working for the Lord and not for people...It is Jesus Christ you are serving.” In this way followers of Jesus will have their conversations always ‘seasoned with salt’ and make the most of every opportunity to help ‘outsiders’ become insiders and experience the Christ-life themselves. In fact, life becomes an adventure; and every situation becomes an opportunity to show love to the one who loves us beyond belief.

#### Alternate Readings & Themes:

1. **“Pity Party? I Pass!.”** Even as a prophet of God, Jeremiah experienced terrible times of depression. Even his calling from God involved taking stands that set others at odds with him, affecting even his intimate relationships. Paul shares good news with the followers of Christ: as children of the light, we can be prepared to face difficult times (as a soldier might arm himself for battle) and be living with Christ now. In fact, Paul calls us to encourage one another and build each other up—providing in the community of faith and the real spiritual relationships Christ’s people provide, the very encouragement we all need to face the inevitable times of trouble and trial. **Jeremiah 20.7-10, 14-18; Psalm 79.5-13; 1 Thessalonians 5.4-10.**
2. **“The Kind of Leader You Want To Be.”** Everyone is a leader in some form or other. In fact, everyone is usually in several different leadership roles: in the home, at work, in community service groups, at church. Jeremiah’s prophetic word to the (bad) leaders of Israel, or shepherds, gives us much insight into how not to lead others. Paul, writing to the followers of Christ at Thessalonica, urges them to support their leaders, and lays out some of the actions and characteristics of a good leader (warning the idle, encouraging the timid, helping the weak, showing patience to all, being joyful, praying always, and showing thankfulness) that every leader can benefit from. **Jeremiah 23.1-6; Psalm 80.7-19; 1 Thessalonians 5.12-16.**