



**Daily Devotionals – January 16 to January 22, 2021  
To Encourage Franklin in Such a Time As This  
By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson-- Franklin Baptist Church**

This brief series of daily devotionals are designed to speak into the days in which we live. But we frame that sacred time in the challenging days of the Covid-19 or Novel CoronaVirus that is spreading across our globe. Take in these daily words of devotion. We hope you will experience wisdom, perspective and yes even hope!

They draw from the Revised Common Lectionary Daily Readings by date.  
(All scriptures will use the New Revised Standard Version unless otherwise noted)

**Saturday, January 16 - Psalm 139  
by Dr. Charles Qualls  
*The Inescapable God***

- 1 O Lord, you have searched me and known me.
- 2 You know when I sit down and when I rise up; you discern my thoughts from far away.
- 3 You search out my path and my lying down, and are acquainted with all my ways.
- 4 Even before a word is on my tongue, O Lord, you know it completely.
- 5 You hem me in, behind and before, and lay your hand upon me.
- 6 Such knowledge is too wonderful for me; it is so high that I cannot attain it.
- 13 For it was you who formed my inward parts; you knit me together in my mother's womb.
- 14 I praise you, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. Wonderful are your works; that I know very well.
- 15 My frame was not hidden from you, when I was being made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth.
- 16 Your eyes beheld my unformed substance. In your book were written all the days that were formed for me, when none of them as yet existed.
- 17 How weighty to me are your thoughts, O God! How vast is the sum of them!
- 18 I try to count them -- they are more than the sand; I come to the end -- I am still with you.

**Devotion:**

I know, I know. We've already had this Psalm for a devotional once this year. In our daily lectionary readings, here were my choices. Study from this one, which is a repeat. Or, we could study from Samuel 2 where he gets onto his sons for...ummm...their dalliances with the temple prostitutes. But, my mother could be reading these things. Or, we could repeat Jesus' parable in Matthew 25 about the unwise bridesmaids, which we've studied even more recently.

I chose this Psalm 139.

We pray at times for God to come near. We should stop more often to consider what we are asking for. The writer of Psalm 139 did, and this psalm is the result. No doubt, part of this spiritual exercise is driven by some anxiety or fear. Near the end, the same writer petitions God to deal justly and decisively with his *enemies*. So, whatever is keeping him up late at night has now found a spiritual trail to wander for a time.

His conclusion is instructive, though. I would urge us all to read these words slowly and at a time when we aren't distracted with other things. Pay attention to what he has realized about God's ever-present and all-knowing nature. When God knows us, God really knows us! When God comes near, God comes really near!

Whatever is...will be evident. Whatever is to be seen will be seen and known. The psalmist is at peace with this, though. Even though God's presence can permeate our very being, the psalmist is okay with that. Am I okay with that? Are you okay with that? It's a nice place to be when we are okay with God's presence. It's a disturbing, haunting place to be when we aren't. Yes?

**Prayer:**

God of our lives, lead me by your spirit to discern what you most want access to. Give me the courage to give you that access, that you might dwell all the closer with me. Amen.

**Sunday, January 17 - John 1:35-51**

by Dr. Charles Qualls

***Jesus Reveals Himself***

35 The next day John again was standing with two of his disciples, 36 and as he watched Jesus walk by, he exclaimed, "Look, here is the Lamb of God!" 37 The two disciples heard him say this, and they followed Jesus. 38 When Jesus turned and saw them following, he said to them, "What are you looking for?" They said to him, "Rabbi" (which translated means Teacher), "where are you staying?" 39 He said to them, "Come and see." They came and saw where he was staying, and they remained with him that day. It was about four o'clock in the afternoon. 40 One of the two who heard John speak and followed him was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41 He first found his brother Simon and said to him, "We have found the Messiah" (which is translated Anointed). 42 He brought Simon to Jesus, who looked at him and said, "You are Simon son of John. You are to be called Cephas" (which is translated Peter).

43 The next day Jesus decided to go to Galilee. He found Philip and said to him, "Follow me." 44 Now Philip was from Bethsaida, the city of Andrew and Peter.

45 Philip found Nathanael and said to him, "We have found him about whom Moses in the law and also the prophets wrote, Jesus son of Joseph from Nazareth."

46 Nathanael said to him, "Can anything good come out of Nazareth?" Philip said to him, "Come and see." 47 When Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward him, he said of him, "Here is truly an Israelite in whom there is no deceit!" 48 Nathanael asked him, "Where did you get to know me?" Jesus answered, "I saw you under the fig tree before Philip called you." 49 Nathanael replied, "Rabbi, you are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel!"

50 Jesus answered, "Do you believe because I told you that I saw you under the fig tree? You will see greater things than these." 51 And he said to him, "Very truly, I tell you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man."

**Devotion:**

Jesus saw the potential and promise in Simon. We probably should be stunned at how early Jesus did see that promise in Simon. In fact, this story argues that Jesus' divinity was intact early in his life. Jesus knew things. Someone probably also sees potential or promise in you that you can't see. Someone probably knows what you can contribute to God's kingdom that you haven't owned up to just yet.

Thankfully, Jesus invested in and developed his closest followers. The Church would need them once He was gone.

What leaps out at you in this story? What one turn of events or spoken phrase catches your attention in today's scripture? Concentrate on that, and afterwards maybe even pray on these things. For me, there are a few. Among them, a pair of John's disciples seem to leave him to follow Jesus. For some reasons I can't altogether put my finger on, that makes me uncomfortable...and encouraged... all at the same time. Jesus' discernment of who Nathaniel was --and what he was thinking -- points to pure divinity.

There's another dimension of this story that we should at least acknowledge briefly. We moderate or mainline type Christians get terribly uncomfortable with the notion of "outreach" or "inviting" others to participate in the faith with us. We are shy about "meddling" and don't want to make our friends "uncomfortable" by inviting them to church or other faith activities with us. I use quotation-marks here because these are church terms and common responses I have heard for years.

We're a little too shy about sharing our faith and including others in what we do. Stereotypes of old-fashioned Baptists, still popular in our culture, don't hold up in reality for all too many of us.

But the fact is Andrew invited his brother (Simon) because he didn't want to keep his newfound insight to himself. Because he did, the eventual *Father* of the New Testament Church (Peter) showed up. Maybe we ought to challenge ourselves at that point a little! I've said since I came here that "Everyone knows one!" That is, one person who would be here with us at Franklin Baptist Church...but won't if you (yourself) don't invite them.

**Prayer:**

Lord, open my heart to learn from this story. Teach me what I need to learn from this story that began when some people remembered to invite some other people to be near Jesus. Amen.

**Monday, January 18 - 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***The Temple of the Living God***

14 Do not be mismatched with unbelievers. For what partnership is there between righteousness and lawlessness? Or what fellowship is there between light and darkness? 15 What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? 16 What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, "I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

17 Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, 18 and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty."

7 Since we have these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from every defilement of body and of spirit, making holiness perfect in the fear of God.

**Devotion:**

Oh boy. The Apostle Paul was speaking to a thorny issue for his time, and one that is still delicate today. In the process, he ended up taking a larger stand than just the practical matter.

Let's unpack this a little.

The Christians at Corinth (just as Christians everywhere then and now) were marrying "unbelievers." Was he telling believers who were married to non-Christians that they should get divorced? No. But he was advising them to not forge new marriage covenants outside their faith if they hadn't already. Was he telling them to not do business, or to not have friendships with people who didn't believe through Christ? No. But he was cautioning them about how much they allied their hearts and minds with those who are not guided by the Spirit through Christ.

So, the wisdom carries on for us today. Back in my youth, we were warned in Church Training about "missionary dating." That is, being in romantic relationships with those who didn't believe. We even heard a statistic that showed in a vast majority of "mixed" relationships (a believer dating or married to a non-believer), over time it was the Christian believer who decreased their spiritual conviction and practice - rather than the other way around. Are there exceptions? Of course there are a few. But time has actually proven that statistic true in my view, I regret to admit.

What is the larger point that Paul makes here? His teaching transcends mere dating and marriage trends. When we Christians allow any influence to supersede our faith -- to supplant the teachings of Jesus and the guidance of the Holy Spirit -- we have failed on what Paul was warning against.

- That means when your favorite news channel or radio voice shapes your convictions in ways contrary to the life and message of Jesus Christ, you are misaligned in your personal temple.
- When the cultural biases and prejudices of your growing up override what your Bible and your faith teach you, you are mismatched.
- When your family, friends and social media convince you to neglect or abandon the love of neighbor as self -- you have become "unequally yoked" spiritually and intellectually.

**Prayer:**

Lord, challenge us to make room for you to be God. Lead us, convict us, to nurture our spirits that we might discern which voices are of you -- and which ones are not! Amen.

**Tuesday, January 19 - 1 Samuel 15:10-31**

**by Dr. Charles Qualls**

***Saul Rejected as King***

10 The word of the Lord came to Samuel: 11 "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me, and has not carried out my commands." Samuel was angry; and he cried out to the Lord all night. 12 Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, and Samuel was told, "Saul went to Carmel, where he set up a monument for himself, and on returning he passed on down to Gilgal." 13 When Samuel came to Saul, Saul said to him, "May you be blessed by the Lord; I have carried out the command of the Lord." 14 But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears, and the lowing of cattle that I hear?" 15 Saul said, "They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the cattle, to

sacrifice to the Lord your God; but the rest we have utterly destroyed.” 16 Then Samuel said to Saul, “Stop! I will tell you what the Lord said to me last night.” He replied, “Speak.”

17 Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. 18 And the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, ‘Go, utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.’ 19 Why then did you not obey the voice of the Lord? Why did you swoop down on the spoil, and do what was evil in the sight of the Lord?” 20 Saul said to Samuel, “I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, I have gone on the mission on which the Lord sent me, I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 21 But from the spoil the people took sheep and cattle, the best of the things devoted to destruction, to sacrifice to the Lord your God in Gilgal.” 22 And Samuel said, “Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obedience to the voice of the Lord? Surely, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.

23 For rebellion is no less a sin than divination, and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has also rejected you from being king.”

24 Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned; for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. 25 Now therefore, I pray, pardon my sin, and return with me, so that I may worship the Lord.” 26 Samuel said to Saul, “I will not return with you; for you have rejected the word of the Lord, and the Lord has rejected you from being king over Israel.” 27 As Samuel turned to go away, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. 28 And Samuel said to him, “The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this very day, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you. 29 Moreover the Glory of Israel will not recant or change his mind; for he is not a mortal, that he should change his mind.” 30 Then Saul said, “I have sinned; yet honor me now before the elders of my people and before Israel, and return with me, so that I may worship the Lord your God.” 31 So Samuel turned back after Saul; and Saul worshiped the Lord.

**Devotion:**

***For rebellion is no less a sin than divination,  
and stubbornness is like iniquity and idolatry.  
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,  
he has also rejected you from being king.***

This story is painful to read. I know that we advertise these daily devotions as “uplifting.” I hope that on-balance, they are. But from day to day, some of the texts we’ll study are more challenging than others. When they go to a challenging or hard place, we need to let them do that and not rob the scriptures of their power to shape us. So, today is one of those days.

King Saul has fallen into disfavor with God. The priest Samuel, who had once delivered the news of Saul’s chosenness and had anointed him to be king must now announce to this same man his fall. Imagine, if you will, how that brought Samuel no pleasure. It also probably brought him no small amount of trepidation. Kings had the power to eliminate bearers of bad news, spiritual or otherwise.

Have you ever said that God never makes mistakes? Have you ever said that God had no regrets and no apologies? You’d better notice how this passage begins. God regrets. We can search this story and easily spot Saul’s transgression. But God punishes sustained and patterned sin in the Bible. Established stretches of disobedience. God does not very often pick on someone simply because of their worst moment or a bad case of misjudgment. Notice that Saul goes on from here to further deteriorate, thereby substantiating that he has, indeed, fallen from an ongoing connection with God.

What do we do with this? Glance back up at the beginning of this devotion. Notice the quote I pulled from today’s text. Read it again. You and I would spend today’s prayer and consideration time well if we searched ourselves. What rebellion against God do I perpetuate in my own living? Where am I stubborn against God’s commands? We’d also do well to remember one thing -- God moved on from Saul and chose David to be the

next king. God will empower and forgive us. But God will also move on to another who is more faithful. Let's keep ourselves usable by God...so that we don't get left behind.

**Prayer:**

God forgive me. And if it is not too late, continue to rebuild me and to use me. Amen.

**Wednesday, January 20 - Luke 18:15-17**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Jesus Blesses Little Children***

<sup>15</sup> People were bringing even infants to him that he might touch them; and when the disciples saw it, they sternly ordered them not to do it. <sup>16</sup> But Jesus called for them and said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not stop them; for it is to such as these that the kingdom of God belongs. <sup>17</sup> Truly I tell you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will never enter it."

**Devotion:**

What can be more precious than little children? That is what today's society teaches, but that was not the case in the time of Jesus.

Today's story is from a time that children were not seen as precious -- rather they were seen as inconsequential. That does not indicate that they were not loved, because their families loved them. By inconsequential, I am simply saying that they were minors and did not have standing in that society.

Because of their age, they had no significant social or legal standing. Children's rights were roughly the equivalent of the rights of a slave. They were the personal property of their fathers, and as such their fathers could do with them as they pleased. Because they were viewed as unimportant, we can begin to understand the disciples desire to keep them away from Jesus. After all, Jesus had important work to do and interacting with children would only deter him from his work.

But, true to form, Jesus does not disappoint. He takes the norm and tosses it aside, much to the horror of the disciples. Whatever the disciples thought their role was, it was certain that they believed themselves to be the protector of Jesus. Thus their actions in v15 are consistent with their beliefs.

But Jesus would not have anything to do with their shortsightedness. Jesus not only invited the children to come to him, he actually encouraged it! This action spoke volumes to his disciples. Can't you hear the questions, "How does he have time to interact with children?" "Doesn't he realize that children have nothing to offer him or to his kingdom?"

By interacting with children, Jesus taught us that everyone is precious in God's sight. Remember the refrain from a childhood song, "Red and yellow, black and white, they are precious in his sight. Jesus loves the little children of the world." It is through the kindness of Jesus that we can see a glimpse of the heart of God. God not only loves everyone, God also goes out of God's way to interact with marginalized people. God makes a habit of showing up and serving people, some of which we would not desire to serve. God has a way of showing up and blessing those who most need God's blessing. God blessed us -- how can we not bless others?

How can we live our lives as Christians without adopting the priorities of Jesus? I'm convinced that loving little children is only the first step in our discipleship. Jesus compels us to show the same love that we have received from God to the outcasts, the marginalized and the ones who are deemed unworthy of love. Maybe, just maybe, that is the true test of our faith.

**Prayer:**

Holy God, Jesus taught us to love those who are difficult to love. May our actions agree with our words. Amen.

**Thursday, January 21 - Psalm 62:5-12**

**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**

***Song of Trust in God Alone***

<sup>5</sup> For God alone my soul waits in silence, for my hope is from him.

<sup>6</sup> He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be shaken.

<sup>7</sup> On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God.

<sup>8</sup> Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us. *Selah*

<sup>9</sup> Those of low estate are but a breath, those of high estate are a delusion; in the balances they go up; they are together lighter than a breath.

<sup>10</sup> Put no confidence in extortion, and set no vain hopes on robbery; if riches increase, do not set your heart on them.

<sup>11</sup> Once God has spoken; twice have I heard this: that power belongs to God, <sup>12</sup> and steadfast love belongs to you, O Lord. For you repay to all according to their work.

**Devotion:**

The Psalmist writes of the importance of having faith in God. Unlike most of the other Psalms, the writer anticipates a response to God's goodness. The structure contains two sections -- Section I contains verses 1-7 and Section II contains verses 8-12.

In Section I, the writer invokes the prominence of God because salvation comes from God. In quietness, we wait before God, because some of God's best work is done in silence. Silence has been growing on us during the pandemic, and hopefully your silence has been filled with God moments -- moments where you have felt especially close to God. Maybe the pitter patter of little feet via zoom or the ability to look at photos from year's gone by to remember those precious memories.

Quietness and stillness heighten our senses to God's work. Quietness and stillness assist us as we tune our hearts to see God work. It is truly amazing to see how God works in our everyday life. It is also amazing to see that we miss God's work because we are too busy to see.

How is your New Year going? Did you make any resolutions? Have you perfected the practice of stillness and quietness? Perhaps we should ask ourselves what is it that allows us the space and time for stillness and quietness? I believe the answer is found in verse 7: "On God rests my deliverance and my honor; my mighty rock, my refuge is in God." Scenes in our lives may change, but God does not. Only God is able to deliver us in times of trouble.

Section II reminds us to not put stock in the imbalances of life. We should not compare our lot in life to others because that could lead to jealousy. Maybe, just maybe, as we practice quietness and stillness we are able to come to the realization that God is enough. God is enough for our situation, for our community and for our world, and yes, God is enough even for the pandemic!

**Prayer:**

Come to us in stillness and quietness Lord. Teach us the reassurance that you, O God are enough for our needs. Amen.

**Friday, January 22 - 2 Peter 3:1-7**  
**by Rev. Steven R. Gibson**  
***The Promise of the Lord's Coming***

3 This is now, beloved, the second letter I am writing to you; in them I am trying to arouse your sincere intention by reminding you <sup>2</sup> that you should remember the words spoken in the past by the holy prophets, and the commandment of the Lord and Savior spoken through your apostles. <sup>3</sup> First of all you must understand this, that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and indulging their own lusts <sup>4</sup> and saying, "Where is the promise of his coming?"

For ever since our ancestors died, all things continue as they were from the beginning of creation!" <sup>5</sup> They deliberately ignore this fact, that by the word of God heavens existed long ago and an earth was formed out of water and by means of water, <sup>6</sup> through which the world of that time was deluged with water and perished. <sup>7</sup> But by the same word the present heavens and earth have been reserved for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the godless.

**Devotion:**

Waiting is both difficult and necessary. Waiting is not one of our finest qualities and is not something to try without determination and resolve. When we wait and focus, we remember and relive past experiences, which is the point in the opening verses of Chapter 2. The apostle's point is simple -- the longer the period of time that has lapsed between an event and the present, the easier it becomes to not remember the event correctly. How many of us can accurately remember an event that happened in our childhood? The remedy for this situation is to remember and recall the events frequently. Recite them over and over again and they will become accurate memories.

This is one of the ways to remember the basics of our faith. By teaching, reciting, and utilizing them in our lives and worship, we remain connected to the anchors of our faith.

If we do not incorporate these beliefs into our lives and worship, we then have the chance of not remembering them correctly. And if we do not remember them correctly, we open ourselves up to false teaching. There will always be false teachers in our midst, and the only way to challenge them is to remember the true teachings of our faith. By remembering the words and actions of the prophets and scripture, we are able to successfully counter the false teachers of the day.

How does this passage relate to our lives today? Opinions are plentiful and often deceiving, just like today. Opinions vary widely on the protocols for Covid, who should receive the vaccine quickly and who should wait. Businesses and employers are stressed and overwhelmed. Workers wonder where their next meal will come from and so on and so on.

With so many opinions, we need to recall the basics of our faith. The naysayers are well aware of our tendency to anguish and fret when we wait for God to answer our petitions. We always desire God's help on our timetable, not when the sovereign God deems it appropriate. We may not admit it, but our prayer life, church attendance and general demeanor suffer when we feel that God has not heard our prayers. In the final analysis, our faith is affirmed when we realize that God's timetable and God's mercy are continually found in our lives.

**Prayer:**

Faithful God, strengthen us during this present time of uncertainty. Renew our faith in your promises, which never fail. Amen.