



**Daily Devotionals – January 2 to January 8, 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 2 - James 3:13-18 by Dr. Charles Qualls
*Two Kinds of Wisdom***

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Show by your good life that your works are done with gentleness born of wisdom. 14 But if you have bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not be boastful and false to the truth. 15 Such wisdom does not come down from above, but is earthly, unspiritual, devilish. 16 For where there is envy and selfish ambition, there will also be disorder and wickedness of every kind. 17 But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy. 18 And a harvest of righteousness is sown in peace for those who make peace.

Devotion:

The writer of James asks a good question: *Who is wise and understanding among you?*

I wish Christians were a little more discerning. We'll ask James' question when we are choosing a doctor or dentist. *Who is wise and understanding of what I need?* We'll ask James' question when we are measuring the skill of a chef or a craftsman. But when it comes to our faith, we seem to fall for so many who are masquerading in "Christian" clothing but who are -- at their core -- not the best voices for us to listen to.

I think church people too often follow or listen to:

- The first person to speak up.
- The person who looks "sharp," pretty or energetic.
- The person who speaks articulately, no matter their content.
- The person who uses a lot of what sounds like "churchy" or spiritual words.
- The person with the largest crowd (or TV presence).

These are shallow measures we wouldn't fall for in almost any other realm of life. Why do we in faith, then? Meanwhile, James hits the nail right on the head here.

Wisdom, understanding...and Christianity... look like a good and loving life. They bear fruit. Jesus was mostly a gentle presence, and even his tougher moments were born of conviction and appropriate substance for the cause. His indignation was righteous. He was not mean-spirited or argumentative at his core.

Here's a pretty good checklist that is really nothing more than v17 broken down for us --

- *But the wisdom from above is first pure*
- *then peaceable*
- *gentle*
- *willing to yield*
- *full of mercy and good fruits*
- *without a trace of partiality or hypocrisy.*

Why then are so many churches run (or influenced by) some of the community's most toxic people? What if you kept on moving with your TV remote when you come across that evangelist who just doesn't seem on the up-and-up, but communicates so smoothly and sure has a big following!? In a new year, wouldn't it be a pretty good promise we could make -- to be more discerning?

Prayer:

Lord, lead us to not settle. Help us to desire more. Even if that means we ourselves will have to keep on serving rather than just hand your kingdom over to anybody. Your cause is worth it. Our faith is that important. Amen.

Sunday, January 3 - John 1:1-18 by Dr. Charles Qualls
The Word Became Flesh

1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him not one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it.

6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world.

10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him. 11 He came to what was his own, and his own people did not accept him. 12 But to all who received him, who believed in his name, he gave power to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood or of the will of the flesh or of the will of man, but of God.

14 And the Word became flesh and lived among us, and we have seen his glory, the glory as of a father's only son, full of grace and truth. 15 (John testified to him and cried out, "This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me ranks ahead of me because he was before me.'") 16 From his fullness we have all received, grace upon grace. 17 The law indeed was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.

18 No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

Devotion:

Technically, v1-9 are not a part of our devotional reading for today. However, picking up with v10 and going through v18 feels like we've entered a conversation midway. That beautiful opening to John's gospel sets up our awareness of what God was doing in Christ.

Taste the irony in v10. He was "in" the world, and the world even came into being through Jesus. Yet, the world did not "know" Jesus. There is a sadness to reading those words. A heaviness. V11 takes our minds to Galilee, as Jesus sat down to teach in his own hometown synagogue and instead they revolted against him. Tried to kill him. Know what Jesus did? He shook the dust from his sandals.

Now, v12-18 take up that marvelous and positive summation of what Jesus was about. The Word became flesh and lived among us. Jesus brought grace where there had been law, compassion where there had been corruption and possibility where there was no hope. I love how v18 closes up this section --
No one has ever seen God. It is God the only Son, who is close to the Father's heart, who has made him known.

What should we do with what we have read and heard from John 1 today? Ultimately, you will have to decide. But you might simply read it all again, from v1 and go through v18. Take your time. Take in some of the weightiest proclamation in all of the Bible. Ask what it is to truly "know" Christ? Then, consider what kind of God would do this for humanity? Now. Now, we know why the New Testament makes the case that God...is love.

Prayer:

Lord, when we say you are *love* we aren't just making a soft touchy-feely statement. You stepped in to be light where there was darkness, and to offer yourself to a world that would not know you. Help us to understand why what you did should mean so much! Amen.

Monday, January 4 - Proverbs 3:1-12 by Dr. Charles Qualls
Admonition to Trust and Honor God

1 My child, do not forget my teaching, but let your heart keep my commandments; 2 for length of days and years of life and abundant welfare they will give you.

3 Do not let loyalty and faithfulness forsake you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart.

4 So you will find favor and good repute in the sight of God and of people.

5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own insight.

6 In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths.

7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the Lord, and turn away from evil. 8 It will be a healing for your flesh and a refreshment for your body.

9 Honor the Lord with your substance and with the first fruits of all your produce; 10 then your barns will be filled with plenty, and your vats will be bursting with wine.

11 My child, do not despise the Lord's discipline or be weary of his reproof, 12 for the Lord reproves the one he loves, as a father the son in whom he delights.

Devotion:

For some reason, this proverb today causes me to think of a wise saying: "The opposite of love is not hate. The opposite of love is indifference."

Perhaps one of the innate yearnings of the faithful spirit is to occasionally find assurance that God loves us. You and I, we long to know that our Creator who holds such sway over life and the universe also knows and cares for us.

You want to know one way to feel that God loves you? Read on and before we end today, I'll affirm one of the many ways you can be sure.

We do tend to assume that the opposite of love is hate. Hate is a plague upon our particular society, and has been a human issue for as long as there have been people. Hate breaks relationships and robs communities of their potential. But hate is not the opposite of love. In fact, one could argue that in order to have hate one has to have first loved. Or, one has to at least have some energy in order to bother to eventually convert to hate.

No, the opposite of love is indifference. If I have no use for you, no feelings about you, that is worse than me being upset with you. When an appliance breaks beyond repair at our house, Elizabeth will comically borrow a phrase from mob lore. She will place a Post-It note on the ailing machine that says, "Dead to me." When someone is dead to us, we have no energy for them; not even to hate. Instead, in Proverbs 3 our writer extols all of the ways in which God has invested in humanity. God cares for us. Teaches us. Guides us and will protect us. God even cares enough to discipline us.

You want to be assured that God loves you? Read this Proverb again. Our Lord is not indifferent. God invests effort and care in you. That is love!

Prayer:

God of our lives, you give and you give. May we slow down, watch and listen. Evidence is all around that testifies to your love for us. Amen!

Tuesday, January 5 - Genesis 1:1-5 by Dr. Charles Qualls
The Light Was Good

1 In the beginning when God created the heavens and the earth, 2 the earth was a formless void and darkness covered the face of the deep, while a wind from God swept over the face of the waters.

3 Then God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light.

4 And God saw that the light was good; and God separated the light from the darkness.

5 God called the light Day, and the darkness he called Night. And there was evening and there was morning, the first day.

Devotion:

Surely you've heard the joke: Where in the Bible is baseball mentioned? Why, it's in Genesis 1:1. *In the beginning...* (Get it? The big...inning?) Well, I never said the joke was hilarious.

At any rate, "light" was awfully important. The earth needed a physical light, seeing as how God was bringing form where there was void. Nothingness. God was creating something where there was nothing. Bringing order into chaos. Eventually, not only was there light, but God managed to separate the light and the darkness into "day" and "night." Both are so important.

So, this crucial thing happened. Now, God wasn't done either.

What I'm going to say next, some of you have heard from me already. Some of you haven't, and may not want to for whatever reason. But here goes. We've all memorized Genesis 1:1 incorrectly because our English translations get it wrong consistently. There is no "the" in Genesis 1:1. In the Hebrew, it's just flat-out not there. The word "the," that is. This is important. Not only that, but the tense of the verbiage suggests not a single moment in time -- but instead ongoing action. Rather than "In the beginning," which sounds like one moment, what it actually says is "In beginning..."

Why does that matter, you say? It really matters a lot. It suggests that Creation is God's ongoing action. It is still happening, rather than having happened thousands of years ago. God is still working on this task of bringing form to the void and making order where there was chaos.

John 1 talks of Jesus as being the “light” that shone where there was darkness. And the darkness did not overcome the light. God is still shining light into the dark places, bringing life, and truth and hope where we are so woefully short on them. I am thankful. I hope you are, too!

Prayer:

God of the light, shine that light where we are today. Continue forming and making us, until all that you have planned would be resolved. Amen.

Wednesday, January 6 - Matthew 2:1-12 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
The Epiphany

1 In the time of King Herod, after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 asking, "Where is the child who has been born king of the Jews? For we observed his star at its rising, and have come to pay him homage."

3 When King Herod heard this, he was frightened, and all Jerusalem with him; 4 and calling together all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Messiah was to be born.

5 They told him, "In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it has been written by the prophet: 6 'And you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who is to shepherd my people Israel.'"

7 Then Herod secretly called for the wise men and learned from them the exact time when the star had appeared.

8 Then he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, "Go and search diligently for the child; and when you have found him, bring me word so that I may also go and pay him homage."

9 When they had heard the king, they set out; and there, ahead of them, went the star that they had seen at its rising, until it stopped over the place where the child was.

10 When they saw that the star had stopped, they were overwhelmed with joy.

11 On entering the house, they saw the child with Mary his mother; and they knelt down and paid him homage. Then, opening their treasure chests, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh.

12 And having been warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they left for their own country by another road.

Devotion:

Albert Einstein has captured the necessity of wonder: “The most beautiful emotion we can experience is the mystical. It is the source of all true art and science. The one to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer wonder and stand in rapt awe, is as good as dead.”

I believe Einstein’s quote is appropriate for this text, because who among us when we encounter the Christ child face to face, will not fall prostrate to worship the new born King?

The scene is full of wonder, excitement and intrigue. Let’s unpack this story together.

Sometimes we Baptists try to consolidate events to make room on the calendar for what is next. Some will be surprised to know that the Wise Men did not arrive at the birth of Christ, but days or even years later. This account has a couple of surprises in it.

Surprise # 1

The Wise Men, who were also astrologers, travelled from the East, from Persia to encounter the Christ child. How did they know the route without Google maps or Siri? They followed the “Christmas Star” that appeared suddenly and moved from East to West to lead them to the child. The star served as a symbol of direction and also knowledge. The star served as a sign of hope and vision for all humanity.

Surprise # 2

The Wise Men (Gentiles) were the ones who brought the announcement of the Epiphany -- a divine revelation or manifestation in the middle of human history. Imagine that the Jews, God’s chosen people, were to receive this message from Gentiles! The symbols of magi and star point us to something that is out of the ordinary. They communicated a transcendental and meaningful revelation.

Surprise # 3

The Magi brought gifts and offered them to the Christ child. Traditionally known as Melchior, Gaspar and Balthazar, they offered specific gifts, not something that is inexpensive and readily available. They brought gold, which is a symbol of royalty; frankincense, which is a symbol of divinity; and myrrh, which is a symbol of death and is used as a burial spice that prepares the child for cruciform kingship. These gifts were an announcement of the rule of the Christ child, the one where the hopes and fears of all the world are met.

Surprise # 4

The magi travelled a long distance to worship and they worshipped with all their hearts! Upon seeing the Christ child, they fell down to worship him and they opened their treasure chests and offered their gifts to him.

Herod’s worship was fake! His only intention was to discover the location of the Christ child so that he could remove any threat to his throne.

This account can be summed up with a quote from David Schnasa Jacobsen:

Matthew prepares us for a narrative to come that helps us see this Jesus in all his paradox. He is the child of promise, yet bears this promise in the midst of threat. That is not just who he is or where he is from, but where he is going.

Prayer:

Illuminate our hearts, O God, that we may observe and worship Christ, the new born King. Amen.

Thursday, January 7 - Acts 9:10-19 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson ***The Conversion of Saul***

¹⁰ Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, “Ananias.” He answered, “Here I am, Lord.” ¹¹ The Lord said to him, “Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul.

At this moment he is praying, ¹² and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight.” ¹³ But Ananias answered, “Lord, I have heard from many about this man, how much evil he has done to your saints in Jerusalem; ¹⁴ and here he has authority from the chief priests to bind all who invoke your name.” ¹⁵ But the Lord said to him, “Go, for he is an instrument whom I have chosen to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel; ¹⁶ I myself will show him how much he must suffer for the sake of my name.”

¹⁷ So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." ¹⁸ And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized, ¹⁹ and after taking some food, he regained his strength.

Devotion:

Have you noticed that God calls and equips some of the strangest people to advance his kingdom? Have you noticed that God calls people that you and I would not even consider for kingdom work? Why does God choose people that we would not choose? I believe that the difference is perspective -- God's perspective verses our perspective.

What is God's perspective? God's perspective is boundless, without any limits and unafraid when confronted by human frailties. We are told about Saul's great reversal from persecuting the early church to being a champion for Jesus Christ. This conversion experience was told not once, not twice, but three times. Thus Saul's repentance and turn toward Jesus becomes of primary importance.

Saul's persecution of the church has taken him from Jerusalem to Damascus where he had planned to continue his bad behavior. His mission was to "bind or capture" believers and to return them to Jerusalem for an inquisition, one that perhaps followed the pattern of Stephen's inquisition. But, a funny thing happened on Saul's way to Damascus. Instead of a take charge zealot who was all about threats against the disciples of Jesus, Saul was blinded by the light! What happens next cannot be made up because it is stranger than fiction!

Saul, the persecutor, becomes Paul the prophet. His encounter with the living Christ has made a sudden and lasting impact on his life. This encounter has a light from heaven, brighter than the noon day sun that flashed around him. The sheer brightness of the light is the exalted Jesus who is shrouded in the glory of God. Saul hears a voice, and this voice caused him to convert to Jesus. Because he does recognize the voice, he inquires, saying, "Who are you, Lord?" His use of the pronoun Lord will be used over and over again.

The crux of this passage is the Lord's prophecy of Saul's missionary journey and also the Lord's reference to Saul as one of the chosen. His specific mission was "to bring my name before Gentiles and kings and before the people of Israel." This mission also continued the church's witness to God's salvation. This is significant because for the first time the Gentiles and kings were placed before the people of Israel. Thus Paul's mission was international because God promised to bless "all the families of the earth."

Paul's message from God also connects his suffering to his personal ministry, "I will show him how much he must suffer." (V16) In Paul's case, suffering is needed to realizing God's promises in the Scriptures.

Can you see yourself in the conversion of Saul? The themes are broad enough to capture most, if not all of us. While we may not have been blinded by the light, we still had a personal experience with the risen Christ where we professed our loyalty to him. Most of us have lost friends because of our faith, but yet, we continue. Our lifestyles have changed, but the constant is that Christ walks alongside us each day, and will continue to support our journey. May our life's work be fruitful and may God's name be praised forever.

Prayer:

God of our tomorrows, please continue to guide us as we seek to live our lives in accordance with your plan. Amen.

Friday, January 8 - 1 Samuel 16:1-13 by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
David Anointed as King

16 The Lord said to Samuel, "How long will you grieve over Saul? I have rejected him from being king over Israel. Fill your horn with oil and set out; I will send you to Jesse the Bethlehemite, for I have provided for myself a king among his sons." ² Samuel said, "How can I go? If Saul hears of it, he will kill me." And

the Lord said, "Take a heifer with you, and say, 'I have come to sacrifice to the Lord.'" ³ Invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and I will show you what you shall do; and you shall anoint for me the one whom I name to you." ⁴ Samuel did what the Lord commanded, and came to Bethlehem. The elders of the city came to meet him trembling, and said, "Do you come peaceably?" ⁵ He said, "Peaceably; I have come to sacrifice to the Lord; sanctify yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." And he sanctified Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

⁶When they came, he looked on Eliab and thought, "Surely the Lord's anointed is now before the Lord." ⁷ But the Lord said to Samuel, "Do not look on his appearance or on the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for the Lord does not see as mortals see; they look on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart." ⁸ Then Jesse called Abinadab, and made him pass before Samuel. He said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ⁹ Then Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the Lord chosen this one." ¹⁰ Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel, and Samuel said to Jesse, "The Lord has not chosen any of these." ¹¹ Samuel said to Jesse, "Are all your sons here?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, but he is keeping the sheep." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." ¹² He sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, and had beautiful eyes, and was handsome. The Lord said, "Rise and anoint him; for this is the one." ¹³ Then Samuel took the horn of oil, and anointed him in the presence of his brothers; and the spirit of the Lord came mightily upon David from that day forward. Samuel then set out and went to Ramah.

Devotion:

This chapter serves as an introduction of David as God's choice and also identifies David as Saul's choice. It is ironic that God chooses David as king and Saul chooses David as a musician. This event, and David's anointing all took place in private, not in public.

The beauty of this passage is that God, once again, chooses an unlikely person as a vessel of God's grace. The choice of God is David, a shepherd, the eighth son, from Bethlehem, whose family contains no known pedigree. This confirms God's message throughout Scripture that God chooses the most unexpected persons as bearers of God's grace. David's family was not a family of wealth and power, as opposed to Saul's family.

The family tree of David is unimpressive. Jesse's grandmother was Ruth, who was an immigrant. Boaz's family, David's grandfather, contains a Canaanite woman who was almost executed for adultery. This is far from the norm, because only families of wealth and power are chosen for prime positions like this. Today, like in David's time, communities often seek to make their power permanent, and we seem to be fine with that. Are we not able to see that God is able to use *anyone* for God's work? Is it beyond our capacity to "see" that God's power is able to choose the marginalized for God's work? If that is the case, then are we really saying that we do not believe that God can find grace for *everyone*?

This passage also speaks, not to outward appearance, but to the heart. Because God looks at the heart, this message is a welcome one in 2021. If we believe that we are created in the image of God, and that we are God's children, then we should not be surprised when God chooses a person that we would have not expected. After all, God is God and we are not!

Prayer:

Dear God, take our hearts and make them into a heart that you can use to minister to your people. Amen.