



Daily Devotionals – August 21 to August 27, 2021

By Dr. Charles Qualls and Rev. Steve Gibson -- Franklin Baptist Church

August 21 - 2 Corinthians 10:12-18
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
Paul Defends His Ministry

¹²We do not dare to classify or compare ourselves with some of those who commend themselves. But when they measure themselves by one another, and compare themselves with one another, they do not show good sense. ¹³We, however, will not boast beyond limits, but will keep within the field that God has assigned to us, to reach out even as far as you. ¹⁴For we were not overstepping our limits when we reached you; we were the first to come all the way to you with the good news of Christ. ¹⁵We do not boast beyond limits, that is, in the labors of others; but our hope is that, as your faith increases, our sphere of action among you may be greatly enlarged, ¹⁶so that we may proclaim the good news in lands beyond you, without boasting of work already done in someone else's sphere of action. ¹⁷"Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord." ¹⁸For it is not those who commend themselves that are approved, but those whom the Lord commends.

Devotion:

One of the pitfalls of humanity is the curse of comparing ourselves to someone else. We instinctively know that some people excel in a particular field, while others excel in a different area. We also know that a person cannot surpass everyone else, yet our humanity demands that we compare ourselves to others.

Whether because of pride or ambition, we challenge ourselves to grow, to accomplish more and to go beyond the normal expectations. All seems to be well until someone "steps" on our territory. It is then that our competitive juices run on overtime to protect what we have worked so long to produce. This is exactly the place that Paul is describing in today's passage and Paul is jealous.

Paul reminds the Corinthians that it was Paul who first brought the Gospel to them. It was Paul that preached the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ to the Corinthians and he intends to continue his ministry with them. Paul does not desire to compare his ministry with the ministry of others, but wants to clear up a couple of things. He states that nothing good comes from comparing ministries. ("But when they measure themselves by one another, they do not show good sense." v12) Paul then continues by saying that he is committed to staying in the field that God assigned him. (v13) This idea of remaining in the field assigned by God continues with a new caveat -- the hope that as your faith increases your sphere of influence also increases. From a competition to expanding ministry is how this chapter ends. Paul states that only those whom the Lord commends are approved servants of God, not those who commend themselves.

Years ago in another town, I met with a group of pastors each Monday. At first, I was eager and excited about attending, but that feeling did not last long. What I perceived was a meeting to encourage each other, to pray for one another and for our churches. Little did I know that the true feature of the meeting was for pastors to brag! "I had the largest attendance" or "I took in the largest offering" or "I baptized more people than you." I am not a fan of spiritual competition, but I am a fan of encouraging others in their ministry. In my little corner of the world, all of us are needed, and when we understand that all of us are needed, then the Gospel will be proclaimed! Thanks be to God!

Prayer:

Thank you God, for investing in us. Thank you God, for allowing us to partner with you. May we spur each other to be faithful in the ministries that have been appointed to us. Amen.

August 22 - Genesis 50:15-26
by Dr. Charles Qualls
Joseph Reassures His Brothers

15 When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "What if Joseph holds a grudge against us and pays us back for all the wrongs we did to him?" 16 So they sent word to Joseph, saying, "Your father left these instructions before he died: 17 'This is what you are to say to Joseph: I ask you to forgive your brothers the sins and the wrongs they committed in treating you so badly.' Now please forgive the sins of the servants of the God of your father." When their message came to him, Joseph wept.

18 His brothers then came and threw themselves down before him. "We are your slaves," they said.

19 But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don't be afraid. I will provide for you and your children." And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

The Death of Joseph

22 Joseph stayed in Egypt, along with all his father's family. He lived a hundred and ten years 23 and saw the third generation of Ephraim's children. Also the children of Makir son of Manasseh were placed at birth on Joseph's knees.

24 Then Joseph said to his brothers, "I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob." 25 And Joseph made the Israelites swear an oath and said, "God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place."

26 So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Devotion:

Welcome to one of my all time favorite scripture passages. I love what happens here between Joseph and his brothers. Not just because some healing occurs, and maybe some new trust is built. But even more, because the honesty that happens during this part of the story is the stuff of life! Oh -- and we finish with Joseph today.

Let's don't miss something that is a bit indicative here. You are not bound to agree with my interpretation of course. But the brothers reveal more of their true character now, I am afraid. Those who are untrustworthy might be the least willing to trust. Those who defraud and deceive are probably most apt to suspect others of deceiving them. In verses 15-18, their father Jacob (or "Israel") is now dead. We have moved ahead closer to the end of our story.

Immediately, it seems, they decide that Joseph might have only been putting on this conciliatory and welcoming act as a ruse for however long their father should live. Perhaps now that Dad is not around to see, "What if Joseph exacts his revenge?" Their instinct for self-preservation kicks in. It appears as though they concoct a fraudulent message from their father, with instructions to his now powerful son. "The brothers are to be forgiven," they represent him as saying.

When I sit down with a passage to work on a sermon, I try to force myself to just live with the scripture text itself for a few moments. I will have time later to dig into the commentaries to see what the scholars say. I will have time to capture my own message based on this later. At first, I am looking for a few things each week no matter the scripture:

- 1) Where is the energy in this text?

- 2) Are there any questions this text raises that need attention?
- 3) What problems or surprises come at me from within the text?

I can find those best if I just stay isolated with the scripture for a time before I worry about the “What am I going to say?” part.

In this era of my life, at any rate, verses 19-21 leap off the page for me in today’s section of the story. Both honesty and compassion are here. Also, confrontation and grace.

19 But Joseph said to them, “Don’t be afraid. Am I in the place of God? 20 You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives. 21 So then, don’t be afraid. I will provide for you and your children.” And he reassured them and spoke kindly to them.

Here are a few conclusions I’ve reached:

- **First, we Christians don’t have to try to perfume every hog that walks in from outside.** In other words, I listen to Christians try to “spin” everything in life to make it fit somehow with “the will of God.” Joseph flat out says it -- what his brothers did, they did because they were evil! His honesty should model for us our own honesty, even in faith conversations. How God works through and redeems a situation in life does not keep it from having been evil, tragic or unfortunate at its roots.
- **Second, Joseph extended grace to his brothers.** Some situations, or some people, are just too broken. We may, as Jesus said, occasionally have to “...shake the dust from our sandals” and move on. But first, we try reconciliation. Joseph gave his brothers yet another chance, and it seems to have worked out.
- **Third, with some people we may still have to live out a “trust but verify” relationship.** Do you think Joseph ever truly, completely trusted his brothers? I doubt it. Forgiving doesn’t mean forgetting. Because we can’t. It’s okay.

Prayer:

Lord, we admit that life and relationships can get complicated. Help us never to force evil intent onto your side of the ledger. But help us to follow your guidance toward the light. Amen.

August 23 - Exodus 2:1-10

by Dr. Charles Qualls

The Birth of Moses

1 Now a man from the house of Levi went and married a Levite woman. 2 The woman conceived and bore a son; and when she saw that he was a fine baby, she hid him for three months. 3 When she could hide him no longer she got a papyrus basket for him, and plastered it with bitumen and pitch; she put the child in it and placed it among the reeds on the bank of the river. 4 His sister stood at a distance, to see what would happen to him.

5 The daughter of Pharaoh came down to bathe at the river, while her attendants walked beside the river. She saw the basket among the reeds and sent her maid to bring it. 6 When she opened it, she saw the child. He was crying, and she took pity on him. “This must be one of the Hebrews’ children,” she said. 7 Then his sister said to Pharaoh’s daughter, “Shall I go and get you a nurse from the Hebrew women to nurse the child for you?” 8 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Yes.” So the girl went and called the child’s mother. 9 Pharaoh’s daughter said to her, “Take this child and nurse it for me, and I will give you your wages.” So the woman took

the child and nursed it. 10 When the child grew up, she brought him to Pharaoh's daughter, and she took him as her son. She named him Moses, "because," she said, "I drew him out of the water."

Devotion:

I am a rule-follower. Therefore, there are parts of Moses' story that make me uneasy. But not for long. You see, Moses' story reminds us that we may occasionally have to choose between what is lawful and what is right to do. I get that. I do. Still, it tugs at me in a way that it might not everyone. Then again, this was life and death. Quite literally.

Moses' story has a powerful, poignant beginning. Read it and try to feel the depth of its complexities. Also, notice the bittersweet victory of his rescue as an infant. I didn't include it, for brevity, but our story actually begins back in chapter one. A new Egyptian pharaoh has taken power. Hundreds of years have passed. He does not know the story of Joseph, nor why Joseph's "Israelite" people are living in his land. He becomes worried that they will soon outnumber the native Egyptians. Why, they could even rise up and try to take over his empire. So, he concocts a plan wherein the Israelites will be allowed to keep any girls born. But if any boys are born, they must be killed. Okay, that's the background many of you will recall.

Earlier this summer, I lost my father. He had been lingering in declining health for quite some time. Wheelchair-bound and deep in dementia, he had become imprisoned in a mind and body that no longer worked. His death came about quickly, at the end. There was deep sadness for us. But also such an abiding sense of relief. His suffering was over. Death was both sorrowful and merciful. At times, one circumstance may bring about both joy and sorrow. Such was the case in the biblical story. Moses' mother wanted to save him. But to do so, she also had to give him up. She was both relieved and heart-broken.

Our text this week happens because of a Pharaoh who lived so long after Joseph's time that he didn't know the story of why the Israelites were even in Egypt. Or...and this is also possible...he did know, but his fear of what they might do somewhere out in the future mattered more to him than what had happened in the past. Read the story with that dynamic in mind.

What place does a healthy, well-chronicled institutional memory play in your church, community or even your family? How can having a good sense of the past help you avoid future trouble? How can the healthy knowledge of your past inform your innovation, change and movement forward? That's what Moses would someday lead his people to do! Israel could no longer stay in Egypt. They would have to leave their 400 year home that had never really been their home to begin with.

Prayer:

Lord, guide our steps ever forward. Lead us to value the informative past, while never being so bound to it that we miss a chance to live into your greatest hopes. Amen.

August 24 - Psalm 8
by Dr. Charles Qualls
A Psalm of David

1 Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory in the heavens. 2 Through the praise of children and infants you have established a stronghold against your enemies, to silence the foe and the avenger.

3 When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, 4 what is mankind that you are mindful of them, human beings that you care for them? 5 You have made them a little lower than the angels and crowned them with glory and honor. 6 You made them rulers over the works of your hands; you put everything under their feet: 7 all flocks and herds, and the animals of the wild, 8 the birds in the sky, and the fish in the sea, all that swim the paths of the seas.

9 Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth!

Devotion:

Maybe you can hear the music in your head as you read today's psalm. I hope so. "The Majesty and Glory of Your Name" by Tom Fettke is one of my all time favorite choir anthems. The words are based on Psalm 8. This psalm, attributed to David, is the first hymn of "praise" in the psalter. James Mays points out that, up to now, the previous seven psalms were all petitions to God for salvation or deliverance.

Now, we hear a rightful reflection on who God is and what God has done. Notice that the first and central thing the writer says is that God's name is "majestic." This is no casual understanding of God. I hope it prompts for all of us our own inner work. Reflection much like what the psalmist does here. We ought to take some time, now and then, to simply search our own spirits about who and what God really is.

Mays also points out something that I have advocated about prayer. This is the only psalm in the Bible that spends its entirety using direct access to God. In other words, the writer speaks directly to God throughout. Think about the ancient Hebrew rabbinical system. This was rare, as access and address of God was always done from within the synagogue or Temple. Priests advocated on behalf of worshippers. One could talk about God. But they were not encouraged to talk to God.

I want to encourage you to talk to God. We can and should. You do not require me to spend time with God. Ever since Jesus' death on the Cross, when the Temple's veil was torn in two, we have understood that we could address God ourselves.

Here's even better news. You can just talk with God like you would your best friend. No fancy language required. No formula. No training. God longs for a genuine, authentic relationship with us. Nothing less. If you haven't ever, try it soon. I encourage you.

Prayer:

Lord, we thank you that you have written your words on our hearts. Now, at the beckoning of your Spirit, may we have genuine time with you. Help us to feel that permission. Amen.

August 25 - Romans 11:33-36

by Dr. Charles Qualls

Doxology

33 Oh, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable his judgments, and his paths beyond tracing out! 34 "Who has known the mind of the Lord? Or who has been his counselor?"

35 "Who has ever given to God, that God should repay them?" 36 For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.

Devotion:

Imagine 8 year-old me on my initial Sunday as our family tried out the First Baptist Church in my small, Georgia town. We had come over from Second Baptist. Up until then, that shaped-note church with the yelling, sweaty and fervent preacher was the only one I had known. There was only about a ½ mile of distance between the two congregations, and only a single digit's difference in the name.

That's where the similarities ended, though. I may as well have crossed over from one continent to another. Or, maybe it would be like boarding a rocket in sunny Florida and after a brief few days, stepping out onto the surface of the Moon. For a minute, this new setting caught me off guard.

The orderly service, the educated minister, the pipe organ and a robed choir up in the loft -- those things struck me. Right there in the middle of the noticeably traditional worship service, they took up the Offering. Someone

played an “Offertory” song on the pipe organ while an organized procession of wooden plates went from pew to pew. Then, as if signaled from up on high, everyone stood to their feet as a new song started to be played. “What in the world is going on?” my young mind wondered.

*“Praise God from whom all blessings flow
Praise him all creatures here below
Praise him above ye heavenly hosts
Praise father, son, and holy ghost. Ahhh....mnnnn.*

I didn’t know him just yet, but I thought a blood vessel in Mr. Fred Eidson’s forehead would burst before that “Amen” ended.

This is a short piece of scripture for our devotional today. It’s brief for a reason. It’s a “Doxology.” Notice the questions that Paul weaves into this little mid-worship song. How would you respond? Why don’t you try praying the words of verse 36 today as an affirmation to God? Just that one sentence of Doxology right here in the middle of your week.

Prayer:

“For from him and through him and for him are all things. To him be the glory forever! Amen.”

August 26 - Matthew 26:6-13
by Rev. Steven R. Gibson
The Anointing at Bethany

⁶ Now while Jesus was at Bethany in the house of Simon the leper, ⁷ a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very costly ointment, and she poured it on his head as he sat at the table. ⁸ But when the disciples saw it, they were angry and said, “Why this waste? ⁹ For this ointment could have been sold for a large sum, and the money given to the poor.” ¹⁰ But Jesus, aware of this, said to them, “Why do you trouble the woman? She has performed a good service for me. ¹¹ For you always have the poor with you, but you will not always have me. ¹² By pouring this ointment on my body she has prepared me for burial. ¹³ Truly I tell you, wherever this good news is proclaimed in the whole world, what she has done will be told in remembrance of her.”

Devotion:

Have you ever bumped into someone on the street and knew who they were, but yet, could not recall their name? Embarrassing, to say the least! Suppose that you were a part of a story that has been told countless times throughout the ages and no one knew your name?

Today’s passage contains both questions that were asked in the first paragraph. This account has several characters: Jesus, the main character; Simon, the leper, who opened his house to Jesus; the disciples; and an unnamed woman. We know the story well -- this unnamed woman anointed Jesus’ head with costly ointment from her alabaster jar.

Several concepts jump off the printed page.

- 1) This dinner party contained a cast of characters who would not see eye to eye with the religious leaders.
- 2) The disciples, especially Judas, would not understand the woman’s actions.
- 3) The disciples were chiefly concerned about the cost of this expensive ointment and how many people could have been served.
- 4) The dinner party set in motion the ultimate betrayal of Jesus by Judas.

- 5) Judas' plan began to take shape in earnest resulting in beginning the negotiations with the chief priests for the cost of Jesus' betrayal.

This scene is filled with contrast and tension. The location is Simon, the leper's house. Had Simon been healed at this point? We simply do not know, but the fact remains that Jesus accepted a dinner invitation at a known leper's house. *If* Simon had been healed and Jesus still went to his house, that is one thing, but if Simon had not yet been healed, that is another thing all together. Jesus' ministry was not bound by the "accepted norms" of the chief priests and rabbis. Rather, Jesus continued his ministry among the undesirables and those who were left out of traditional ministry. Ministering to the outcasts was a normal part of Jesus' ministry. For Jesus, the social and religious boundaries did not matter, only ministry to one of the "least of these." (Matthew 25:45)

Jesus is anointed by an unnamed woman, and her extravagance will be remembered throughout history -- yet we do not know her name! Her anointing of Jesus' body is preparing Jesus for his death and burial, all while Jesus is still alive. His offering is of uncalculatable cost, but according to the deal Judas made with the chief priests, the value of turning over Jesus is only 30 pieces of silver.

Jesus had taught his disciples about the economy of the kingdom. He had taught that the poor would always be with you, and in this passage Jesus is trying to teach them that his time on earth is limited. This unnamed woman engaged in an ancient practice of anointing priestly holiness upon a royal head. Agnes W. Norfleet states that Messiah means "anointed" and by her gracious outpouring of extravagant oil she recognizes him as king. While the disciples are seeking to honor the lessons that Jesus had taught them about love of God and neighbor, they simply cannot comprehend the sacrificial nature of Jesus' life.

The contrast between the woman's extravagant anointing with Judas betrayal is shocking. Judas traded his friendship for a mere handful of coins. Today's church has the same dilemma -- how are we to allocate time and resources? Church members can question the decisions on allocation of resources and that is their right. We may never all agree on the correct balance between the needs of worship and the needs of neighbor.

To me, this passage serves as a reminder that even as we study the anointing and the betrayal of Jesus, we need to remember that which never changes -- Jesus' position at the table in the midst of our salvation.

Prayer:

God of endless compassion, envelop our lives with the desire to anoint you as Messiah, and to minister to the least of these. Amen.

August 27 - Ephesians 5:1-6

by Rev. Steven R. Gibson

Rules for New Life

5 ¹ Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children, ² and live in love, as Christ loved us and gave himself up for us, a fragrant offering and sacrifice to God.

Renounce Pagan Ways

³ But fornication and impurity of any kind, or greed, must not even be mentioned among you, as is proper among saints. ⁴ Entirely out of place is obscene, silly, and vulgar talk; but instead, let there be thanksgiving.

⁵ Be sure of this, that no fornicator or impure person, or one who is greedy (that is, an idolater), has any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.

Devotion:

We have heard it said over and over again that imitation is the sincerest form of flattery. If that saying is true, why do we not imitate Christ more each day?

Chapter 5 begins where Chapter 4 ends as the Apostle admonishes us to be kind to one another, forgiving one another as God in Christ has forgiven you. Truly, a high bar to measure up to!

We are called to imitate God, just like beloved children. And if we are beloved children, we ought to live in love as Christ loved us. We are called to treat others just as Christ has treated us -- Christ gave himself up as an offering to God *for us!*

But the question remains -- how can we imitate God? Practically speaking, our lives must refrain from fornication and impurity, obscene, silly and vulgar talk. This list is not exhaustive by any means, but abiding by this list challenges us. In short, we are to renounce and put away any pagan ways.

The phrase "to put away pagan ways" at first glance seems to be an easy task. But upon further examination, one discovers the task is not so easy.

Professional people worked hard for their degrees and their training, and by so doing developed patterns and habits according to their expertise. Imagine if the patterns and habits that were unique to your profession were conflicting to imitating God -- what would you do?

I believe that the big stuff is fairly easy to eliminate in our lives. For instance, do not murder, or commit adultery or covet your neighbor's belongings. When our methodology comes into question, we need to take a step back and reexamine what and how we are working in the kingdom.

Questions:

- 1) Who do we imitate?
- 2) Are others able to recognize our daily imitation of Christ?
- 3) What elements of our lives hinder our imitation of Christ?
- 4) How can we become more effective imitators of Christ?

If your life is anything like mine, the more layers of the onion that you peel, the more you discover that needs attention. May you and I always be able to call ourselves "beloved children of God" and may our lives reflect that singular purpose.

Prayer:

Ever knowing God, assist us as we seek to remove anything from our lives that would prevent us from being a beloved child of God. Amen.