

## DAILY DEVOTIONS

### *Monday, April 12 – Love Reins Us In*

*It is good neither to eat meat nor drink wine nor do anything by which your brother stumbles or is offended or is made weak.* Romans 14:21

Most young Samoan boys receive a tattoo signaling their responsibility to their people and their chief. Naturally, then, the marks cover the arms of the Samoan men's rugby team members. Traveling to Japan where tattoos can carry negative connotations, the teammates realized their symbols presented a problem for their hosts. In a generous act of friendship, the Samoans wore skin-colored sleeves covering the designs. "We're respectful and mindful to . . . the Japanese way," the team captain explained. "We'll be making sure that what we're showing will be okay."

In an age emphasizing individual expression, it's remarkable to encounter self-limitation—a concept Paul wrote about in the book of Romans. He told us that love sometimes requires us to lay down our rights for others. Rather than pushing our freedom to the boundaries, sometimes love reins us in. The apostle explained how some people in the church believed they were free "to eat anything," but others ate "only vegetables" (Romans 14:2). While this might seem like a minor issue, in the first century, adherence to Old Testament dietary laws was controversial. Paul instructed everyone to "stop passing judgment on one another" (v. 13), before concluding with particular words for those who ate freely. "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother or sister to fall" (v. 21).

At times, loving another means limiting our own freedoms. We don't have to always do everything we're free to do. Sometimes love reins us in.

#### PRAYER:

*Father, help me to see where I need to encourage others to experience freedom and how I need to limit how I use my own freedoms. Amen.*

## *Tuesday, April 13 – Seeing God All Around Us*

*For the cloud of the Lord was above the tabernacle by day, and fire was over it by night, in the sight of all the house of Israel, throughout all their journeys.*

Exodus 40:38

On January 28, 1986, the US Space Shuttle Challenger broke apart seventy-three seconds after takeoff. In a speech of comfort to the nation, President Reagan quoted from the poem “High Flight” in which John Gillespie Magee, a World War II pilot, had written of “the high un-trespassed sanctity of space” and the sense of putting out his hand to touch “the face of God.”

Although we can’t literally touch God’s face, we sometimes experience a stunning sunset or a place of meditation in nature that gives us an overwhelming sense that He’s near. Some people call these moments “thin places.” The barrier separating heaven and earth seems to grow a little thinner. God feels a little closer.

The Israelites may have experienced a “thin place” as they sensed the nearness of God in the desert wilderness. God provided a pillar of cloud by day and pillar of fire by night to lead them through the desert (Exodus 40:34–38). When they were staying in the camp, “*the glory of the Lord filled the tabernacle*” (v. 35).

Throughout all their travels, they knew God was with them.

As we enjoy the incredible beauty of God’s creation, we grow conscious that He’s present everywhere. As we talk with Him in prayer, listen to Him, and read the Scriptures, we can enjoy fellowship with Him anytime and anywhere.

### PRAYER:

*Father, help me to seek and find You even when I’m lost in a desert wilderness.  
Amen.*

## ***Wednesday, April 14 – In The Garden***

***Mary Magdalene went to the disciples with the news: “I have seen the Lord!”***

John 20:18

Some years ago, I sang with a group of guys and one in particular, loved the old hymns of the church. One of his favorites was “In the Garden.” And when it came time for him to sing his verse, he stepped up to the mic and sang with his whole heart. A few years back, that same song was a part of his home going service. The chorus is simple: “And He walks with me, and He talks with me, and He tells me I am His own, and the joy we share as we tarry there none other has ever known.” That song brought joy to my dad—as it does to me.

The writer, C. Austin Miles, says he wrote this song in spring 1912 after reading chapter 20 of the gospel of John. “As I read it that day, I seemed to be part of the scene. I became a silent witness to that dramatic moment in Mary’s life when she knelt before her Lord and cried, ‘Rabboni [Teacher].’ ”

In John 20, we find Mary Magdalene weeping near Jesus’ empty tomb. There she met a man who asked why she was crying. Thinking it was the gardener, she spoke with the risen Savior—Jesus! Her sorrow turned to joy, and she ran to tell the disciples, “*I have seen the Lord!*” (v. 18).

We too have the assurance that Jesus is risen! He’s now in heaven with the Father, but He hasn’t left us on our own. Believers in Christ have His Spirit inside us, and through Him we have the assurance and joy of knowing He’s with us, and we are “His own.”

PRAYER:

*Father, I’m so thankful that Jesus is alive today and as Your child You live in me!  
Amen.*

## *Thursday, April 15– Anchored*

*I will fasten him as a peg in a secure place, And he will become a glorious throne to his father's house.*

Isaiah 22:23

I remember back in the 90's doing some remodeling on a nearly century-old house with a lot of character, including wonderfully textured plaster walls. As we spoke with the building inspector, he cautioned us that with these walls, to hang a picture we would have to either drill the nail into a wood support or use a plaster anchor for support. If we didn't, we would risk the picture crashing to the ground, leaving an ugly hole in the wall as well.

The prophet Isaiah used the imagery of a nail driven firmly into a wall to describe a minor biblical character named Eliakim. Unlike the corrupt official Shebna (Isaiah 22:15–19), as well as the people of Israel—who looked to themselves for strength (vv. 8–11)—Eliakim trusted in God. Prophesying Eliakim's promotion to palace administrator for King Hezekiah, Isaiah wrote that Eliakim would be driven like a “*peg into a firm place*” (v. 23). Being securely anchored in God's truth and grace would also allow Eliakim to be a support for his family and his people (vv. 22–24).

Yet Isaiah concluded this prophecy with a sobering reminder that no person can be the ultimate security for friends or family—we all fail (v. 25). The only completely trustworthy anchor for our lives is Jesus (Psalm 62:5–6; Matthew 7:24). As we care for others and share their burdens, may we also point them to Him, the anchor who will never fail.

PRAYER:

*Father, thank You for being my anchor. As Your child, I know that I'm firmly planted in You. Amen.*

## *Friday, April 16 – Companions In The Faith*

*I thank God every time I remember you.*

Philippians 1:3

The Harvard Study of Adult Development is a decades-long project that's resulted in a greater understanding of the importance of healthy relationships. The research began with a group of 268 sophomores at Harvard University in the 1930s and later expanded to, among others, 456 Boston inner-city residents. Researchers have conducted interviews with the participants and pored over their medical records every few years. They discovered that close relationships are the biggest factor in predicting happiness and health. It turns out that if we surround ourselves with the right people, we'll likely experience a deeper sense of joy.

This appears to reflect what the apostle Paul is describing in Philippians 1. Writing from prison, Paul can't help but tell his friends that he thanks God for them every time he remembers them, praying "with joy" (v. 4). But these aren't just any friends; these are brothers and sisters in Jesus who "*share in God's grace,*" partners in the gospel with Paul (v. 7). Their relationship was one of sharing and mutuality—a true fellowship shaped by God's love and the gospel itself.

Yes, friends are important, but fellow companions in Christ are catalysts of a true and deep joy. The grace of God can bind us together like nothing else. And even through the darkest seasons of life, the joy that comes from that bond will last.

*PRAYER:*

*Father, thank You for loving me so much. A love that encourages us to rest. May we find complete rest in You! Amen.*

## *Saturday, April 17 – A Refuge for Rejection*

*Be merciful to me, O God, be merciful to me! For my soul trusts in You;  
And in the shadow of Your wings I will make my refuge,...* Psalm 57:1

George Whitefield (1714–1770) was one of the most gifted and effective preachers in history, leading thousands to faith in Jesus. But his life wasn't without controversy. His practice of preaching outdoors (to accommodate large crowds) was sometimes criticized by those who questioned his motives and felt he should speak only within the four walls of a church building. Whitefield's epitaph sheds light on his response to others' harsh words: "I am content to wait till the Day of Judgment for the clearing up of my character; and after I am dead, I desire no other epitaph than this, 'Here lies George Whitefield—what sort of a man he was, the great day will discover.'"

In the Old Testament, when David faced harsh criticism from others, he too entrusted himself to God. When Saul falsely accused David of leading a rebellion and he was forced to hide from Saul's approaching army in a cave, David described being "*in the midst of lions,*" among "*men whose teeth are spears and arrows, whose tongues are sharp swords*" (Psalm 57:4). But even in that difficult place, he turned to God and found comfort in Him: "For great is your love, reaching to the heavens; your faithfulness reaches to the skies" (v. 10).

When others misunderstand or reject us, God is our "refuge" (v. 1). May He be forever praised for His unfailing and merciful love!

PRAYER:

*Father, I praise You that I can be accepted by You forever because of Your Son.  
take refuge in Your perfect love today. Amen*

## *Sunday, April 18 – Showing Love*

*My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.*

1 John 3:18

“You learn to love by loving.” Francis de Sales

God demonstrated His love for us by sending His Son to redeem us. Ultimately, we love God and those around us when we actively demonstrate it.

Think about your relationships with those closest to you. Are you saying "I love you," but neglecting to show it on a regular basis? Sometimes it's easy to get into a routine with those who mean the most to us. If we aren't intentional about loving one another, not just in words, but also in deeds, our relationships will begin to suffer.

How can you show someone your love - through words and through deeds - today?

PRAYER:

*Lord, thank You for demonstrating how to love by sending Your son Jesus. Help me to make loving others through my words and deeds a priority in my life. In Jesus Name, I pray, Amen.*