

“GOD’S LOVE WILL NEVER LET YOU GO!”  
by Rom A. Pegram (5/20/18)

I don’t know that much about mountain climbing, but I am quite impressed with those who do climb mountains ... especially mountains like Mount Everest! More than 3,000 climbers have made it to the top. But, several thousand have failed—more than 220 dying in the attempt. And the place they most often failed was the South Summit to Hillary Step. There, there’s a knife-edge ridge made of ice, snow, and fragmented shale—10,000 feet straight down into Tibet on one side, and 7,000 feet down into Nepal on the other...

Erik Weihenmayer is one of those who made it all the way to the top—one who knows the unnerving sound of rock chipping off, plunging into the void below. And Erik is now a hero of mine. You see, Erik would have heard those sounds more keenly than nearly any other climber. Why? Because he was the first blind man to reach the summit of Mount Everest. And, just so you know, that’s not Erik’s only achievement. On August 20, 2008, he reached the top of Carstensz Pyramid in Indonesia. And this completed his goal of reaching what’s known as ‘The Seven Summits,’ a group of imposing peaks, one from each of the world’s seven continents. Totally blind since the age of 13, Erik has overcome a number of mountain-sized challenges in his life...

So, I know what some of you are thinking. How did he do it? It’s hard enough for those with keen eyesight, but how did this person—totally blind—scale these mountains safely and successfully? Well, since mountains are filled with massive, man-swallowing crevices, climbers who take them on must be tightly fastened to a rope. As Erik recalls, “Even when the wind was howling and I wouldn’t be able to hear footsteps crunching in front of me, I’d have the direction of the rope to follow.”

How important is that piece of equipment to mountain climbers? Vitally important. It’s the difference between death and glory! The rope is a lifeline bonding a half-dozen adventurers who must have utter faith in its strength.

And that rope is even more important to a climber like Erik. All his information comes through his elevated senses of hearing and touch. He and his friends are tethered to the rope, and he feels the tension of their movement as they climb upward. When someone slips, he clutches the line, and through it he knows what is happening and braces himself for danger. *The rope is his guide in the midst of a perilous journey, the one thing that will not fail him when he is uncertain of his next step...*

In one significant way, we are all just as blind as Erik Weihenmayer. We cannot see the future ahead of us any more than he can see his next step. We cannot know what lies even 5 weeks or 5 minutes or 5 seconds into the future. Sometimes, life may be an easy stroll ... and sometimes it may be a desperate run. Either way, it doesn’t matter ... because we too have a rope! GOD’S LOVE is the unbreakable line that tethers itself to us and tethers us to one another, and keeps us on the path as we ascend toward heaven. That rope is our sure and steady lifeline ... no matter what! If you’ve ever

doubted God's love in your life, listen to our scripture for today and you'll hear the Bible's idea of that unbreakable rope that binds us to God (Romans 8:35-39, NLT)...

Can anything ever separate us from Christ's love? Does it mean he no longer loves us if we have trouble or calamity, or are persecuted, or hungry, or destitute, or in danger, or threatened with death? <sup>36</sup> (As the Scriptures say, "For your sake we are killed every day; we are being slaughtered like sheep.") <sup>37</sup> No, despite all these things, *overwhelming victory is ours* [we are more than conquerors] through Christ, who loved us. <sup>38</sup> And I am convinced that nothing can ever separate us from God's love. Neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither our fears for today nor our worries about tomorrow—not even the powers of hell can separate us from God's love. <sup>39</sup> No power in the sky above or in the earth below—indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord.

This is like a sales demonstration of God's love, isn't it? 'Anyone remember that ol' Super Glue commercial where a car was suspended in midair, held to a cable by nothing but a dab or two of that incredible adhesive? The test, of course, was to convince people that if Super Glue could do that, it could surely patch up your broken vase ... or whatever job you had for it to do...

'Same thing with God's love... What Paul is telling us here is that there is nothing in this entire universe that can top this—that could ever stop God from loving us! It simply *cannot* and *will not* happen...

To explain his position, here in Paul's letter to the Romans, Paul uses a rhetorical device known as *merism*—stating a pair of contrasting words to represent the full range of everything in between. We use *merism*, for instance, when we say things like, "He knows his subject from A to Z." So, folks, let's get down it today: What can separate us from Christ's love (and here are Paul's *merisms*)? First...

**Neither Death nor Life...** What can separate us from the love of God? Not the crisis of death or the calamities of life... Sometimes death seems like the greatest separation that we could ever imagine—from everything familiar, our life, our loved ones, our dreams. But not for those who are Christ-followers...

Paul was one who faced death many times in his adventures as a Christ-follower! He, too, loved many people in this world, and he didn't want to leave any of them. But, as scripture shows us, even the executioner's sword didn't faze Paul in the end! He cried triumphantly (1 Cor. 15:55, NLT), "O death, where is your victory? O death, where is your sting?"

I'll never forget my father's words to the doctor when they were telling him that he wouldn't get better; he was going to die. Triumphantly, he told that doctor and all of us there, "Well, if what I've preached all my life is the truth—and *I know it is*, then let me go! I'm ready to die!"

That's how Christ-followers can view death. Not even death can separate us from Christ's love! Nor can anything we go through in life—deep grief, despair, depression, serious physical challenges ... like heart disease, the loss of one's child. We sometimes think of these things like these as "a fate worse than death." But, I've seen people overcome the worst imaginable crises too many times to count! These people (i.e. Jim Middagh) have proven that we can overcome—ordinary people who learned to trust an extraordinary God! Next...

**Neither Angels nor Demons...** What can separate us from the love of God? Not the intervention of angels or the intrusion of demons... I'm not sure how God's angels could separate us, but their demonic opposites I can understand...

Some versions of the Bible call them *principalities*... On this earth, we contend with more than just the evils that can be inflicted on us by nature (tornados), accidents, or other people. Paul explains that we have even greater enemies (Eph. 6:12, NLT): "For we are not fighting against flesh-and-blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places."

How can we contend with these supernatural beings that possess supernatural powers? It'd be like fending off a nuclear bomb with a BB gun, wouldn't it? But, remember that rope. They cannot destroy us, and they cannot hurt us in our inner spirits where we are firmly tethered to God's love! Also...

**Neither Our Fears for Today nor Our Worries about Tomorrow...** What can separate us from the love of God? Not the cares of today or the concerns of tomorrow! Paul just took away all our excuses for worrying, didn't he? Jesus basically called worry *unbelief* anyway, so that's a good thing. "No worries!" That's what the Aussies say. And that's what Paul is telling us here, too. Now, *I know that worry is a very real thing* (not to mention a hobby for some). And today, it seems as if our daily worries are only magnified as the Western world continues to turn away from God in many ways and things like declining economies cause widespread hardships amongst individuals and families...

At every moment in human history, people have faced threats from both the present and the future, on both a personal and a cosmic level. And each time Christians have asked, "Is God still with me through all this?"

Let me say this: *Those who trust in the ways and purposes of God will be strengthened in the present and prepared to face whatever the future holds.* Suffering is inevitable; it comes to everyone. But only those who live in the certainty that *God's love will never let*

*them go* are able to accept with confidence and assurance both the troubles of the present and the troubles that may come tomorrow... Finally,

**No Power in the Sky Above or in the Earth Below...** What can separate us from the love of God? Not the pinnacle of heaven or the pit of hell—*nor heights or depths*...

The truth is, there are heights and depths in every life that could affect one's relationship with God. For instance...

- If someone inherited ten million dollars, they would likely reach the height of self-sufficiency that could easily drive out all thoughts of God; or they could go bankrupt and be convinced that God does not love them...
- Another could achieve positions or accomplishments that would lift their pride to heights; or, they may have failures that would plunge them into the depths of despair...
- A successful athlete's physical prowess could put them at the height of their profession; or, a serious injury could lower them to the depths of disability...

We find potential threats to our confidence in God's love in both our highs and our lows in life. What we have to come to believe and remember is this: in all such cases, the love of God is intact—at the heights (even though a person's attention may be far away from God) and at the depths (when a person believes God must have abandoned them)... Check out Psalm 139 sometime, for further study. There's nowhere you can go to escape God's love! Or, as heavyweight champ Joe Louis once said: "You can run, but you can't hide!" So it is with God's pursuing love...

Verse 39b concludes today's lesson: "...indeed, nothing in all creation will ever be able to separate us from the love of God that is revealed in Christ Jesus our Lord." NOTHING! At the risk of sounding like a country song ... *is there any part of 'nothing' we don't understand?*

Folks, life on earth will inevitably have its pits and snares, its crevasses and howling winds. It will have lonely times, when we must climb in solitude. It'll have confusing days, when we simply can't understand the logic of what's happening. And in all of these things, *we must choose*...

- ...to either believe—as *some do*—that God is dead...
- ...or we can see—as *others do*—that there is no pit so deep that God's love is not deeper still.

It's our choice. So, which will you choose?

I'm here to tell you there is marvelous, astounding, supernatural power that comes *when we finally cease our struggling and begin to trust the rope*—the infinite love of God! You need never let go of your hope, because God will never let go of His love for you... **GOD'S LOVE WILL NEVER LET YOU GO!**