

# RIVER Flow

*Seven Days of Devotional Practice*

June 14 - 20, 2026

## **LOVING GOD AND COUNTRY**

Two Weeks Toward the Religious Liberty Summit  
Week 2 – A Better Country

This is the week of our Summit. This Sabbath, June 20, our church hosts the Religious Liberty Summit – “Religious Liberty and the Church’s Prophetic Calling” – here at Auburn Seventh-day Adventist Church. We will hear from Alan Reinach, president of the Church State Council (9:30), and Andy Im of the General Conference’s Public Affairs and Religious Liberty Department (10:45), with a panel discussion and your questions at 2:00. The last devotional in this guide falls on that very Sabbath.

Last week we asked God to help us order our loves rightly – to love him above all, so that we might love our country well. This week we simply keep looking at Jesus, and at the better country his gospel gives us.

The aim of these two weeks has never been to make us love our country less, but to set that love free by resting it safely beneath our love for Christ. Read each day slowly, pray each prayer as your own, and come this Sabbath as a free and grateful people.

- Pastor Mel Baga, D.Min.  
Lead Pastor, Auburn SDA Church

# Daily Devotional Guide

## SUNDAY, June 14 – Where Belonging Comes From

*“Your life is hidden with Christ in God.” – Colossians 3:3*

**Read:** Colossians 3:1–4; 1 Peter 1:3–5; John 3:3

**Reflect:** Underneath so much of what we feel about our country is a longing for belonging — to be safe, to be home, to be part of something larger than ourselves that will not fall apart. It is one of the deepest and most human of all longings, and there is no shame in it at all. The only difficulty is that a nation, however beloved, was never made to carry the whole weight of that longing.

The gospel speaks very tenderly here. Paul says that if we have been raised with Christ, our life is now hidden with Christ in God — kept safe in a place no change on earth can reach. Peter says we have been born again to a living hope, to an inheritance that is imperishable, kept in heaven for us. Your truest belonging is not finally American, or anything else on this earth; it is “in Christ.” And that belonging cannot be lost when a culture shifts or an election turns.

This is what sets us free from fear. When we know our life is hidden with Christ in God, we no longer need our country to be our refuge, and we can stop holding it with such anxious, white-knuckled hands. We are free to love our land warmly and to hold it loosely at the same time — because the Lamb, not the nation, is where we are finally and forever safe. You belong to him. Nothing can take that away from you.

**Respond:** Name any fear that hides underneath your feelings about the country. Then preach gently to your own heart: my life is hidden with Christ in God.

**Pray:** Lord, my belonging is in you, my life hidden with Christ in God. Free me from fear, so I can love my home with a glad and open hand. Amen.

## MONDAY, June 15 – From Every Tribe and Tongue

*“A great multitude... from every nation, tribe, people and language.” – Revelation 7:9*

**Read:** Revelation 7:9–10; Genesis 11:1–9; Acts 2:1–11

**Reflect:** It is natural to feel most at home among people who look, sound, and worship the way we do. There is real comfort in a familiar culture, and God truly meets us in our own language and our own songs. But that comfort can quietly narrow into something smaller — a faint sense that

God's people ought to look mostly like us, and that difference is somehow a threat to be managed.

The whole sweep of the Bible gently widens our hearts. At Babel, a humanity grasping to be one uniform people is scattered. At Pentecost, the Spirit falls and the gospel is suddenly heard in every native tongue — the many languages not erased, but filled with the praise of God. And at the end, John sees a multitude beyond all counting, from every nation and tribe and people and language, standing together before the Lamb. God does not melt the nations down into one. He keeps every tongue and tribe, and makes their very differences beautiful.

So the family of God is far larger and far more colorful than any single nation or culture — and that is by his glad design, not against it. Our little congregation, and our worldwide church, are meant to be a small foretaste of that countless multitude. We lose nothing of our own home and heritage; we simply discover that heaven is bigger than we imagined, and that the brother or sister from a faraway land is part of our own forever family. What a thing to look forward to.

**Respond:** Where has your circle of worship and friendship grown a little narrow? Take one warm step this week toward the wider family God is gathering.

**Pray:** Thank you, Father, that your family is far bigger than any one culture or country. Make me long for, and live toward, the multitude from every tribe and tongue. Amen.

## TUESDAY, June 16 — The Way Down

*"It shall not be so among you." — Mark 10:43*

**Read:** Mark 10:35–45; Philippians 2:5–11

**Reflect:** When we care about something, we want it to have a strong voice and a real place in the world — and Christians, quite naturally, want their faith to matter in public life. That longing is not wrong. But it can subtly shift into a hunger to be on top, to hold the levers, to make sure our side is the one in charge. And that is exactly the place where Jesus, ever so gently, turns us around.

His own disciples once argued over who would get the best seats, and he stopped them with great tenderness. The rulers of the nations love to lord it over others, he said, but it shall not be so among you; whoever would be great among you must be a servant. And he showed them the way in his own life: though he was in the very form of God, he did not grasp at status but emptied himself, took the form of a servant, and went all the way

down to a cross — and only then did God lift him high. In the kingdom of God, the way up is always down.

This is a relief, not a burden. We do not have to win, or dominate, or be in charge for God's work to go forward. We are freed to take the lower place, to pick up the towel and the basin, and to serve our neighbors — including the ones who see things differently than we do — the way our King served us. Influence in the kingdom of God has never looked like sitting on top. It has always looked like a cross, and a servant's quiet love.

**Respond:** Where do you feel the pull to want to be “on top”? What would it look like, this week, to take the lower place and serve instead?

**Pray:** Lord Jesus, you went all the way down in order to lift me up. Cure me of the hunger to rule, and teach me the strange greatness of the towel and the basin. Amen.

## WEDNESDAY, June 17 — Welcome the Stranger

*“You shall love him as yourself, for you were strangers in the land of Egypt.” — Leviticus 19:34*

**Read:** Leviticus 19:33–34; Luke 4:24–30; Acts 10:34–35

**Reflect:** It is a natural thing to want to protect what we love, and to feel a little uneasy when the people around us seem unfamiliar — a different language, a different faith, different ways of living. That unease is human, and being honest about it is the first kind step. But the gospel keeps gently stretching our hearts toward the very people we might be tempted to keep at arm's length.

God told his own people: when a stranger lives among you, do not mistreat him; love him as yourself, for you yourselves were once strangers in Egypt. Jesus pressed it even further. In his very first sermon, he reminded his hometown of the times God's grace had reached past Israel to a foreign widow and a Syrian soldier — and it stirred them, painfully, to anger. And Peter had to learn, on a rooftop, that God shows no partiality, and that he is welcomed in every nation. The heart of God has always leaned, tenderly, toward the outsider.

We can let our own hearts lean the same way, because we remember what we once were: outsiders ourselves, far off, with no claim on God, brought near only by the kindness of Christ. We did not earn our seat at the table; we were simply welcomed in. How then could we not open the door to others? To follow Jesus is to learn, slowly and by grace, to love the stranger as ourselves — not because it comes easily, but because that is exactly how we were first loved.

**Respond:** Who is the “stranger” your heart finds hardest to welcome? Ask God for his heart toward them, and take one small, real step of kindness.

**Pray:** Lord, I was a stranger, and you brought me near in Christ. Give me your tender heart for the foreigner and the outsider, and open my hands and my door. Amen.

## THURSDAY, June 18 – One Mediator

*“There is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus.” – 1 Timothy 2:5*

**Read:** 1 Timothy 2:1–6; Acts 17:24–31

**Reflect:** It can be a comforting thought to believe that God has a special need for our country – that his cause in the world somehow rests on our nation’s strength, that he is depending on us. The thought is often born of love and a sincere desire to be useful to God. But it can also lay on a nation a weight no nation was ever meant to bear, and quietly move something out of its proper place.

When Paul stood in Athens, he said the God who made the world made from one man every nation, and set the times and the places of each – every nation under his hand, all of them precious, none of them indispensable, all of them made simply to seek him. And there is, Paul says, one mediator between God and us: not a nation, not a culture, not a Christian civilization, but one Person, Christ Jesus, who gave himself for all. Salvation has never needed a country to carry it. It reaches each of us straight from the cross.

This actually lifts a burden from our shoulders. God’s purposes do not finally rest on whether our nation succeeds; they rest on Christ, who cannot fail. We are free to love our country gladly and pray for it earnestly without believing the gospel rises or falls with it. There is one Mediator, and he is more than enough – for us, for our land, and for every land on earth. Tomorrow we draw nearer to the Summit standing on that quiet, solid ground.

**Respond:** Anywhere you have felt that God somehow needs your country, set that burden down. Rest in the truth that Christ alone is the Mediator, and he is enough.

**Pray:** There is one Savior, and he carries the whole world. Jesus, be my Mediator and my Lord, and let me serve my country freely, resting all my hope in you. Amen.

## FRIDAY, June 19 – Seek the Welfare of the City

*“Seek the welfare of the city... and pray to the Lord on its behalf.” – Jeremiah 29:7*

**Read:** Jeremiah 29:1-7; 1 Peter 2:11-12; Hebrews 11:13-16

**Reflect:** Sometimes we imagine there are only two ways to relate to our country: either we wrap our faith tightly around it, or we grow cynical and walk away. But the gospel offers a third and far better way – and it turns out to be the most loving way of all to be a citizen.

God once wrote to his people while they were exiles in Babylon, far from home, and his counsel surprised them: build houses, plant gardens, raise families, and seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, and pray to the Lord on its behalf. Scripture calls us sojourners and exiles, our truest citizenship in heaven – and that is precisely what frees us to love the place we live without ever worshiping it. We can pray for our nation, work for its good, do justice, love our neighbors, and be among its very finest citizens.

So loving Christ first does not make us love our country less; it teaches us to love it well. We are free to seek the welfare of our city with a whole heart, precisely because the heart’s worship has already been given to God. That is the deepest patriotism of all – not the kind that clutches and fears, but the kind that serves, and blesses, and prays – holding our country dear, and our God dearer still.

**Respond:** Name one concrete way to seek the welfare of your own city this week – and one leader to pray for, including someone you did not vote for.

**Pray:** Lord, let me love and serve this land as a faithful sojourner – seeking its good, praying for its people, and resting my whole heart in you. Amen.

## SABBATH, June 20 – The Kingdom That Comes Down

*“I saw the holy city... coming down out of heaven from God.” – Revelation 21:2*

**Read:** Revelation 5:9-10; 21:1-4; 22:1-5

**Reflect:** It can feel, especially in anxious times, as though everything depends on us – as though the future of the faith itself rests on whether we can save and secure our country. That feeling is heavy, and it is exhausting, and the gospel has a gentle word that lifts it right off our shoulders.

The Bible does not end with a city we build. It ends with a city that comes down – the New Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God, a finished gift. The Lamb who was slain has already gathered his people from

every tribe and language and nation, and made them a kingdom. The hope of the world is not a great nation; it is the Lamb upon the throne, and the city he is bringing, where God himself will dwell with us and wipe away every tear, and the leaves of the tree are for the healing of all the nations. We do not save the kingdom. The kingdom saves us.

And so we come to this Sabbath, and to our Summit, not anxious or grasping, but rested and free. Over these two weeks we have simply been asking God to put our loves in their right order — to love him above all, and to love our country well because we love him most. Today we gather to think together about religious liberty and the church's prophetic calling, and we come as a free and grateful people: defending the freedom of every conscience, loving our land without fear, and resting in the kingdom that is surely coming because Jesus himself is bringing it. The Sabbath says it best of all — the work is finished, the city is his, and we may rest.

**Respond:** Come to the Summit today rested rather than anxious. Lay any burden of “saving” the nation gently at Jesus’ feet, and worship the One whose kingdom is already on its way.

**Pray:** Come, Lord Jesus. Until you do, let me rest in your finished work, love my neighbor and my land, honor the freedom of every conscience, and worship you with all my heart — the Lamb upon the throne. Amen.

## GROUP DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. So much of what we feel about our country is really a longing for belonging. What does it mean for that longing that our life is “hidden with Christ in God”? How might that free us from fear?
2. From Babel to Pentecost to the great multitude in Revelation, God keeps every tribe and tongue. How does it stretch and gladden your heart to know the family of God is far bigger than any one nation or culture?
3. Jesus told his disciples “it shall not be so among you,” and showed them the way down. Where do we feel the pull to want our side to be “on top”? What does servant-greatness look like in everyday life?
4. God told his people to love the stranger because they had once been strangers themselves. Who are the “strangers” your heart finds hard to welcome? How does remembering our own welcome by Christ change that?
5. “There is one mediator... the man Christ Jesus.” How does that lift the burden of feeling our country must carry God’s cause — while still freeing us to love and serve it?
6. God told the exiles to seek the welfare of their city and to pray for it. How is loving Christ first actually the very thing that frees us to love our country well? What is one way you can seek your city’s welfare this week?
7. The Bible ends with a city that comes down, not one we build. How does that lift the burden of feeling we must “save” everything ourselves? As we gather for the Summit today, what would it look like to come rested and free rather than anxious?