

A DISCIPLE-FORMING RESOURCE



Selah

**PAUSING TO PRAY
IN A RUSH HOUR LIFE**

Week of Prayer A Guide for Individuals and Small Groups



The Evangelical Covenant Church

With the demands on our lives each day, many of us don't have a moment to ourselves. This week of prayer resource focuses on the Psalms as we take time to stop, pause with purpose, and pray. Selah is a musical mark of instruction meaning stop and listen, pause and reflect. When was the last time you paused? In the rush hour traffic of life, will you take a moment to Selah? Pause. Stop, but don't just stop. Pause with a purpose. And pause to pray.



Department of Christian Formation
The Evangelical Covenant Church
Website: CovChurch.org
For information: Covenant Resource Center (800) 338-IDEA (4332)
To order: CovenantBookstore.com

About the author: John E. Aho lives in Dearborn, Michigan, with his wife Michelle and three daughters. Life in the Motor City makes developing a lifestyle of Selah difficult, but not impossible. Take time each day to pause with purpose. Turn your fast-paced life around. Take the time to take a time out. You can even take a 180-day journey through "Selah—Pause With a Purpose." For more information about this resource, contact christian.formation@covchurch.org.

Scripture taken from the Holy Bible, Today's New International Version® TNIV®
Copyright © 2001, 2005 by International Bible Society®. All rights reserved worldwide.

Although the Hebrew text includes the word Selah, newer versions may omit or footnote it. Selah remains significant, as we pause with purpose to pray.

This resource is also available in Spanish and Korean.

Para recursos del Departamento de Formación Cristiana en español comuníquese con Wilson Herrera: wilson.herrera@covchurch.org

© Copyright 2011 The Evangelical Covenant Church

DAY 1 BLESSED

READ: Psalm 1

REFLECT: If we pause long enough, we realize our definition of success can be a little different than Scripture's view of being blessed and fruitful. Where do we look when we need to redefine success?

David wrote that we are truly blessed when we delight in God's instruction. What does it mean to be blessed? Abraham was told his life would be blessed so that he could bless others (Genesis 12:2). Jesus taught on certain attitudes that would be blessed (Matthew 5:3-12). You are blessed when you are merciful to others. Be gentle. Hunger for something deeper than just physical food. Make peace.

Being blessed means to be divinely or supremely favored. Fortunate. Happy. Content.

We are blessed when we do not walk (conduct our lives) in the counsel (the opinions, beliefs, thoughts) of the wicked or stand in the way (path, road) of sinners or sit with mockers. Conduct your life in the ways of those who desire to live righteous, upright, godly lives of integrity. Stand (place your feet firmly) along the road of those who want to do what's right. Take a seat with those whose words are uplifting, instead of tearing others down. How much you are blessed depends on where you are walking, where you are standing and where you are sitting. Where are you?

David wrote that a blessed life is also a fruitful life. Are you seeing the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23) growing in your life? Are you more or less loving? Are you more or less joyful? Are you more or less patient? Are you bearing the fruit of others' lives or in others' lives? Your fruitfulness will grow as a result of your faithfulness to God's words and your fullness of God's presence.

Kings were instructed to have a copy of God's words for themselves (Deuteronomy 17:18-20). It kept them from conceit. Joshua was instructed to read God's words day and night (Joshua 1:8-9). It helped him face his fears.

SELAH: How would someone become more fruitful and blessed in life if they meditated on (engaged in thought; reflected on) God's words? What happens in a person who allows these words to speak to them and saturate them?

PAUSE TO PRAY: As you reflect on Psalm 1, are there people you know who need to experience God's blessings? Pray for someone with whom you can share David's words.

AS A GROUP: Reflect on people in your faith family who are living a blessed life. Reflect on Matthew 5:3-10 together. How can it be the basis of a blessed life? How is it different than our culture's definition of success?

READ: Psalm 2

REFLECT: David asked, “*Why do the nations rebel?*” That’s a great question. Why do we rebel? Why do we do our own thing and go our own way? Why can’t we just follow instructions? Why can’t we simply believe people when they warn us to learn from their mistakes? Why is it we have to make our own? The reason is that we are rebellious by nature. “*There is no one who does good, not even one*” (Psalm 14:3).

“*Let us break their chains and throw off their shackles*” (v. 3). How many people think that believing in God is simply too restraining? They feel chained. Shackled. Held back. There is no area in life where we can live without restraints. Speeding through life has its consequences. God’s response is an interesting one.

“*The One enthroned in heaven laughs*” (v. 4). Did you know that? When we attempt to live life our own way, it actually brings laughter. However, it’s not something our God truly finds funny. It’s the kind of laughter that comes when you are shocked at someone’s bold rebellion. It’s laughing in disbelief over someone making the same mistakes over and over again.

God’s laughter then turns to correction. That’s not necessarily what we want. But it is what we need.

Most children will tell you why parents need to discipline their kids. They will answer how wild kids can get if parents give little direction. The One who said, “*You are my Son; today I have become your Father*” (v. 7), is the Father who wants to guide us and discipline us when needed. We must submit to God’s rulership and leadership in our lives or our lives will fall to pieces (v. 9). If we are wise, we will “*serve the LORD with fear and celebrate his rule with trembling*” (v. 11).

SELAH: In what way are you still going your own way and doing your own thing? What are the results of living a life in rebellion? What areas of your life do you need to submit to Jesus’ lordship? Where do you need to fully surrender to God?

PAUSE TO PRAY: Pray for those who are living in outright rebellion. Can you recall people who have fallen away from the faith? Pray for them. Pray God would save them. And pray, asking whether you can be the one to help bring them back.

AS A GROUP: Pray for faith family members you haven’t seen in a while. Pray that God would give you innovative ideas for drawing them back in. Ask the students in your group whether there are friends you can pick up for an event or worship. Pray together for them.

READ: Psalm 3

REFLECT: There were times when David’s enemies were from neighboring countries. At other times his enemies were in his own home.

This was a song David wrote when he was running for his life—running from his son, Absalom. Absalom was a very handsome young man (2 Samuel 14:25). He may have looked good on the outside, but inwardly he was devious.

Samuel’s second book records his conspiracy, how Absalom “*stole the hearts of the people of Israel*” (2 Samuel 15:6). When David was told that all the men of the city were following Absalom, he ran away. As he climbed the Mount of Olives, barefoot and head covered, he began to cry (2 Samuel 15:30). David then wrote the words of this prayer.

His hope, his expectation was that God would see his distress and would act on his behalf. At the point of exhaustion, he and all those with him rested. He stopped. He paused. He paused with a purpose. Will you? Will you stop and rest when you’re tired from all the running around?

“*I call out to the LORD, and he answers me from his holy mountain*” (v. 4). He voiced his prayers, not under his breath, but out loud. When was the last time you sat down and had a heart to heart conversation with God?

Imagine his thoughts. “I cry aloud. Yes, I could pray in my mind. But this morning I’m crying out loud. I’m praying out loud. I’m voicing my prayers.” After David wrote that line he wrote, “Selah.” It occurs three times in this little song. When was the last time you paused? David, out in the wilderness, was forced to pause from all that was going on around him and inside of him.

Though nothing had changed around him, something changed inside him. David was able to sleep. “*I lie down and sleep; I wake again, because the LORD sustains me*” (vs. 5-6). Sleep can be the first thing that goes when we worry about what’s happening around us. But when we pause and speak our concerns out loud to God, we find the comfort we need to wake refreshed, sustained, and encouraged.

SELAH: When was the last time you poured your heart out to God? Do you think God would be surprised by your honesty? What are those things for which you are losing sleep?

PAUSE TO PRAY: Stop what you are doing right now, and voice out loud what you’re thinking and what you’re feeling. Verbally hand over those areas of your life for which you are losing sleep.

AS A GROUP: Share with each other those things that can cause people to lose sleep. Discuss what the top worries of people in your community are, and pray God would meet them where they are. Read Matthew 11:28-30 together and pray that truth into people’s lives.

READ: Psalm 4

REFLECT: Sometimes we need a reminder that David was a husband, a father, a commander-king. As all kings did, they listened and gave their judgments when people came to them to act on their behalf. He was a pretty busy man. There were battles to be fought and decisions to be made.

Sometimes those responsibilities caused a lot of stress. When we read his words, he was facing the reality and pressures of everyday life—as a family man and as a leader.

Distress. Great pain. Anxiety. Sorrow. Acute mental suffering. Affliction. Trouble.

As he faced his fears and piloted his way through pain, he knew he had a God who would hear him in his trouble. These were not just words of an idealist. In the past when he called out to God, God gave him relief from the stresses of life. When he wrote, he penned these passages from his past experiences. He wasn't simply hoping God would act. He knew God would. *"The LORD hears when I call to him"* (v. 3). He will. He does. David had proof from his past. Then David added something Paul would later quote: *"Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent"* Selah.

Do you remember a time when God answered when you cried? Recording when God acts in your life will give you proof—if you need it—for the future when you might wonder and doubt whether God is listening to you at all. When you feel the raw emotions of anger, you can lose perspective. Though David remained angry as he placed his head on the pillow, he reflected. He slowed his life down. He hushed the angry thoughts. He stood still in the presence of the One who could bring him peace.

SELAH: Stop and think about the times when God has acted in your life. Keeping a journal will help you remember all those times God heard when you called. Write down those things for which you are grateful. Where can you go to quiet down your life?

PAUSE TO PRAY: Pray through any issues that make you really angry. Is there someone in your circle of friends or family that is having a hard time letting go of their anger? Pray they would do as David did: Lie down. Be still. Pause with purpose.

AS A GROUP: Read Ephesians 4:20-27 together. Discuss how anger gives the enemy of our souls an opportunity to do more damage and a place to hold onto. Pray through any issues of anger that may exist in your faith family.

READ: Psalm 5:1-6

REFLECT: Take a deep breath. Let it out. Sighing is letting out your breath audibly when you're full of sorrow, when you're weary, or when you're relieved. David once wrote in Psalm 38:9, *"All my longings lie open before you, Lord; my sighing is not hidden from you."* You see, God not only hears the words you speak and reads the thoughts you think. God hears and understands the breaths you breathe.

I could just hear him admit, "I have had so much pain lately that even my sighing is reflected in this song. Do you realize that my King and my God even hears my sighing? He hears the breath I breathe when I'm surrounded with sorrow. He hears the breath I breathe when I'm deep in depression. I am at the end of my rope, no longer able to hold on and I'm asking my King to hold on to me."

He continued. *"Hear my cry for help, my King and my God, for to you I pray"* (v. 2).

Think about it. When do you need help? You need help when you're in trouble. You need help when you can't go on any longer. You need help when you are at the end of your own resources. You need help when you have no strength left.

Though David was facing a number of problems on the horizon, he still went vertical. Did you catch how he said *my King*? He's not just *a King* or *the King*. He's *my King*. He's not just *a God* or *the God*. He's *my God*. Is he your King? Is he your God?

David calls God, King. No matter how much influence you have, you had better make sure you're being influenced. No matter what and who you're leading, you had better make sure you're being led.

SELAH: Verse three reads, *"In the morning, LORD, you hear my voice."* Stop and make Jesus your first option. Go to Jesus even when all you can do is sigh. God hears what is said under your breath. In what way can you get a better grip on your relationship with God today? Can you say with David, my King and my God?

PAUSE TO PRAY: Share about those things that cause you to sigh, and then pray with another person. Don't be afraid to ask for help.

AS A GROUP: Talk about strategies for making Jesus your first option. What ways can you help even the children and teens among you to spend time with Jesus daily? Pray together that more people in your church and outside your church experience God as "my King and my God."

READ: Psalm 5:3,7-12

REFLECT: Expectation is an attitude of looking forward in anticipation. It's the degree of probability that something will occur. You can have great expectations. You can have low expectations. You can expect great things for yourself, or you can expect you'll never amount to much. Sometimes when people have been burned by others, their expectations can be low. What are you expecting?

Listen to David's heart. I wait in expectation. I look forward in anticipation. There is the strong probability that God will answer, God will act. Why do I know this? Because God has done it over and over and over again. No matter what's going on inside of me, no matter what's going on around me, I eagerly wait for the how. Not the if. The how. I wait for how God is going to answer me. I have an attitude that looks forward in anticipation because at every turn in my life, my King and my God has answered.

What we see depends mainly on what we look for. Expectation is an attitude of looking forward in anticipation. Your attitude determines your altitude.

Reading through the Psalms while we read through David's life can help us keep his songwriting in perspective. Sometimes when reading Scripture, we feel like these are just ideals. We hear these truths on Sunday, but do they really work on Monday?

David not only wrote his songs during times of soaring celebration, but also during times of debilitating disappointment. Do you remember 2 Samuel 15? I think we simply need a reminder that when David wrote words like Psalm 3:4 *"I call out to the LORD, and he answers me,"* he was writing down his thoughts when things weren't looking very good. It's one thing to tell you to expect great things from God when life's cruising along fine. It's quite another when you're running for your life.

SELAH: What are you looking for? What are you anticipating? What are you expecting? What can you do today to increase your expectation? No matter what's going on around you, you can always change what's going on inside you by looking above you.

PAUSE TO PRAY: What are you expecting for your life, your family, or your church? When you pray, do you wait, looking forward in anticipation?

AS A GROUP: Too many people in church voice the problems in church without being a part of the solution. Pray God would give you solutions. Pray for not *whether* God will answer you, but *how*. Pray expectantly, looking to see *how* God will answer, not *if* God will answer. Take a moment to pause in silence and listen for God's voice.

READ: Psalm 6

There are so many emotions in the Psalms, and David's sixth song contains some heart-rending refrains. We don't have a context for it, but David's emotional agony began to strike at his body.

"I am faint."

"I am worn out."

"All night long I flood my bed with weeping."

"My eyes grow weak with sorrow."

"I grow old."

Emotional torment began to settle in as physical grief. His bones were even in agony. Something had shaken him to the core. Stress can weaken us, tire us out, and work us over. It can even begin to age us. What is it in life that's taking a toll on your life?

Though everything in his life and body railed against it, David went vertical. Though so much was tearing him down, attempting to keep him down, he lifted up his voice.

"Have mercy on me."

"Heal me."

"Deliver me."

"Save me."

Though nothing had changed in his circumstances, he had this hope of being heard. *"The LORD has heard my cry for mercy; the LORD accepts my prayer"* (v. 9). You, too, can have that hope. No matter the emotional pain or the physical grief, don't let what pulls you down keep you down. Lift your voice to God to sense God's grace, healing, and rescue.

SELAH: Are you feeling pain physically because of what's going on in you emotionally? Where do you need God's grace? What do you need God to heal? What do you need to be rescued from? Those who need to be saved from danger usually do all they can to ask for help. Where will you go today to get the help you need?

PAUSE TO PRAY: Ask for prayer for those areas in your life where you are feeling physically down and emotionally drained. Don't be afraid to ask for help. Some of the best help you can get comes as you pray with other strugglers.

AS A GROUP: It is possible by now that you feel comfortable sharing with others the trials you are experiencing. Allow a few minutes for individuals to share a struggle, if they wish. Have someone in the group pray immediately for him/her before moving on to the next person.