

June 22, Ordinary 12C (1 Kings 19:1-4, (5-7), 8-15a; Psalm 42 and 43)

Psalms 42 and 43 remind us of the ways a spiritual practice can prepare us for whatever trials we meet in life.

by [Martha Spong](#) in the [June 2025](#) issue

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We weren't on the run like Elijah that Saturday, just taking advantage of the opportunity to see the mountains from the Payette River Scenic Byway, otherwise known as Idaho 55. On a clear and unseasonably warm day in March, we turned the GPS directions off and followed the twisting highway along the river, stones still piled high with snow. As we reached higher elevations and the temperature dropped, the rental car's screen continued to show us where we were until, too remote for a signal, the arrow indicating our vehicle drove off the graphic map and onto a matrix of crisscrossing lines.

The miles passed, the snow caps got higher, and then we drove out of the woods and through small towns at increasing elevations. At this point we started to wonder about lunch, but we passed through the most crowded and touristy town at 5,030 feet, descending toward the endpoint of Route 55, where we would meet our route back via Idaho 95. Pulling into New Meadows, we turned onto an unpaved side street. We had just enough internet to find a promising spot: BBQ at the Intersection, with 4.5 stars on Yelp.

I am the member of our party who worries about whether our basic human needs will be met; my spouse figures we will find something somewhere. For that Idaho road trip, I made it a point not to look things up ahead of time—I urged myself to make a discipline of it. Still, about halfway up the scenic byway, I began to fret. We had to be back in Boise at a certain time. Although this trip was 100 percent optional, a sabbatical moment, I was on the verge of having a hungrumpy Elijah moment. *Fine, it doesn't matter if we get lunch. I'm at no risk of wasting away.*

It is a genuinely difficult spiritual practice for me to trust, to say, “There is enough time to get where we need to be.”

Yet suddenly an angel in black, with a sleeve of tattoos, greeted us and showed us to a table. Our meals arrived with a color-coded basket of six sauces, all delicious. The brisket and pulled pork amazed us. The beer, so cold and refreshing, came in an even colder glass. Why does this place in the middle of nowhere, as our youngest would say, “go so hard”? Fed and feeling cared for, we resumed our journey. And yes, we were on time to our next rendezvous.

I was so glad I had not given in to anxiety.

My spiritual practices have included meditation, devotionals lectionary-based and otherwise, writing, journaling in conversation with the psalms, and many other things that have changed and developed over time. Some feel fairly easy to maintain, but most require a day-in, day-out (or week-in, week-out) discipline. On Fridays, for instance, my spouse and I use the Gottman Institute’s State of the Union method to check in with each other. Its categories and questions offer a mutual examen. What went right this week? How can I make you feel more loved this coming week? On Sundays, I plan ahead for what we will eat for lunch, and I include my mother-in-law, because making it feel like an occasion becomes a gift to the whole family. It’s more than just a solution to the problem of needing a meal.

For years, the invitation to confession at our church has been the same, and answering the question “Why do we do it together?” with “because we are a community, a covenant people” opens my heart every time. We are in this together. We come into the worship space seeking community, reaffirming our covenant with one another, and acknowledging that even though we get things wrong, the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting.

Psalms 42 and 43 remind us of the ways a spiritual practice can prepare us for whatever trials we meet in life. Where is my God? We ask this alongside Elijah. Maybe we think, *I have lived a faithful life, perhaps even a brave and public faithful life. Why then does everything feel turned against me and mine?* These psalms remind us that our feelings are not unique; they are universal. They are not merely of this time; they are of all times. They end in the same way: *Calm down, inner turmoil! Hope in God, and keep practicing praise for the one who helps us.*

Repetition of a discipline works on us. Even on a day when we are not feeling it deeply, there is a reminder of how it moves us on other days. And in those moments when the practice connects, when it goes hard, we experience renewal as reviving as a cake baked on hot stones and a jar of water.