

The prayer in the pause (Psalm 77:1-2, 11-20)

Sometimes I find myself stuck in the Selah.

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In the past I read scripture like the weekly preacher I used to be. What is the captivating phrase? How is the Holy Spirit offering provocation in these words and in this moment? What theme will serve God and also keep people engaged? When my vocation changed, my relationship to the texts changed, too. The last question dropped away, and to some extent the first did, too. But there in the middle lay the question that always applies.

My wife and I read the lectionary passages as our morning devotional practice, after which we pray together. We have a routine: one reads the text, the other reads the devotional book questions. One opens our prayer time, the other responds, and the first closes the prayer. On a recent morning, when it was my turn to lead the prayer, I had no words. The world? *Waves hands around*. Our country? *More hand-waving*. Personal concerns? *Deep groaning by the Spirit on my behalf, I hope*.

I sat quietly, and I waited. Sometimes the prayer is in the pause.

Psalm 77 centers that pause, using the word *Selah*. The full psalm has phases, each with its own Selah, but this week's lectionary portion gives us one pause near the middle of the reading. We cry out to God with the psalmist, naming our distress but also naming God's strength and power. Even nature is in awe of God, so surely we can get the assistance we long for!

But sometimes, even often these days, I find myself stuck in that pause, that Selah.

What to say?

Selah.

Selah comes into the middle of the muddle. I worry about family, community, country, and world. My thoughts feel cacophonous, like a mega-feed of Bluesky, Facebook, and TikTok (which I usually see in two-week-old reels on Instagram).

When you see that the word Selah is repeating, do you skip ahead?

Set a timer now for two minutes of pause. Take three deep breaths, then stay put.

(Don't worry, I will be here waiting.)

How did that feel?

I can only speak for myself. Choosing to stay in the pause nourishes my pondering and allows anxieties to settle. It creates space for God to speak into the quiet. Sometimes it brings me to clearer thinking or deeper comfort.

The psalmist declares, "What God is so great as our God?" God meets our cries for help. God meets us in moments of joy. God meets us in works of wonder.

And surely, God meets us in a deep breath and a long pause. Selah.