



water from rock

Selah: Stop, Look, Listen – June 29, 2021

The Lord be with you.

We first began the Selah podcast on March 24 of last year. It's a time that we'd been hit by the pandemic, we were headed into lockdowns, trying to bend the curve, it was a time of social distancing, a time of... Well, at a time of fear, anxiety. A time that I knew that I needed and thought perhaps you might need it too... To stop, to be still, and to listen for the voice of God in the midst of the noise and confusion.

And that's how these podcasts began that we call Selah.

Selah is a Hebrew word, it's a biblical word that has the idea of stopping, of paying attention, of slowing down in order to listen for God. I remember as a boy coming across the word selah in the Book of Psalms, and I didn't know what selah meant, it was a strange word to me, and so I asked my mom, and without any knowledge of Hebrew, my mom was right on with her answer... My mom said that the word Salah... Well, it's telling us to stop and don't rush ahead with our reading, but stop and pay attention to what we just read. Mom said that Seale... Well, there was something like a railroad crossing sign telling us to stop, look and listen. And so we've been doing these selah podcasts three times a week in order to help even me to stop what we're doing for a few moments and to listen for the voice of God.

You will find the word selah in poetry sections of the Bible, sections of the Bible that are calling us to slow down in our reading, to read thoughtfully, prayerfully. Selah is used 71 times in the Book of Psalms and three times in the poetry sections of the book of Habakkuk as selah goes well with Hebrew poetry that's telling us to slow down a bit, to give some close prayerful attention to what we've just read and to listen for the voice of God. Here's a word picture that might help us to think about the word selah. Selah comes from a Hebrew verb meaning to hang up, to weigh something. To hang up something on scales in order to weigh it... When I was a boy in the cotton farm picking cotton, I would come to the end of a row of cotton and a man would hang up my sack of cotton, he would hang it up on scales in order to weigh it. Selah has the idea to hang up something on scales in order to weigh it, to assess it, to value it. So in time, in the Bible, the word Selah takes on the meaning of to stop and weigh what you've just read, don't rush on, don't read ahead but stop and think about it. Meditate on it. Reflect on it. Listen for God's voice to you.

Now, I'm gonna share with you a way of reading the Bible that can really help you and me practice selah. It's where we stop, look and listen for God's voice. It's an ancient way of praying scripture that's called lectio divina, that's divine reading. Lectio divina. And lectio divina comes in four steps,



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read, reflect, respond, rest.

First step, read. Read slowly, prayerfully, two or three times a short scripture text, and as you read, you listen, you listen for God speaking to you through the words, you pay close attention to a word or phrase that stands out to you.

Step two, reflect. Reflect on what you've just read, take time to savor a word or phrase that stands out to you, meditate on it, reflect on it.

Step three, respond. Respond to God speaking to you in what you've just read, take time to talk to God about your feelings, your thoughts, your questions about what you've read and reflected on, take time to make this a real dialogue with God's spirit who lives within you.

Step four, rest. Rest in God's presence for a few moments. For many years, this step had been missing for me in my reading of Scripture, but it's a real vital element of reading and reflecting on God's word. In this step, just let yourself experience the rest that Jesus promises. Just be still and know that He is a God.

Let's take a moment now to practice *selah* in Psalm 46, where we find the word *selah* used. Psalm 46, verse 1, God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore, we will not fear though the earth should change, or the mountain shake in the heart of the sea. Though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble with its tumult. *Selah*.

In other words, this isn't too important for us to just rush ahead with our reading, *selah*. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. In the year 1527, Martin Luther was praying this Psalm, Psalm 46 with *lectio divina*. And as Luther, read, reflected, responded and rested, he was moved to pick up a pen and to write the words of what became that great hymn, A Mighty Fortress is our God a bulwark, never failing. That's what came to Martin Luther as he practiced *selah*. As he read, reflected, responded, and rested in what God was saying. So think again about the Psalmist words. God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.

So how about you? About taking some *selah* in your life today. To read, reflect, respond, and rest.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thanks for listening until next time.