



Our lives are a tapestry woven from countless threads -- connections with others, meaningful work, social inequities, daily routines, moments of joy, sorrow, and prayer. In the midst of it all, we often overlook the gifts hidden within each of these moments.

Statistics reveal a sobering reality: 77% of us face overwhelming stress that impacts our physical health (stress.org), and 31% of us struggle with anxiety disorders (NIMH study). Amid this turmoil, the ancient spiritual practice of Selah offers us a profound invitation to pause and savor the presence of God within the rhythm of our daily lives.

This practice finds its roots in the Psalms, where the term Selah called communities to pause and reflect. Often placed between verses or even mid-sentence, Selah may have signaled a musical interlude, but it also served as a sacred invitation to pause in quiet contemplation.

Joan Chittister, a Benedictine Sister and advocate for justice and peace, speaks of the Latin term Statio, a practice inviting us to pause and be fully present to God amid life's hustle and bustle. Like Selah, Statio calls us to sacred pauses before action, nurturing presence and inner peace (Wisdom Distilled from the Daily, 1990, p. 176).

For those who practiced Statio, intentional moments of arriving early, walking mindfully, giving thanks, transforming travel into sanctuary, and praying while waiting helped counterbalance stress and disconnection. Similarly, we are invited to slow down and reconnect with God's love and guidance.

WHY YOU NEED SELAH

Pausing to be present with our loving God brings peace and joy to our souls. It is medicine for when we are:

- Over-stressed
- Absorbed in emotional pain
- Too busy
- In crisis

- Overloaded with information
- Missing human touch
- Worried or frustrated
- Distracted by many things
- Pulled into people-pleasing
- Not true to ourselves
- Entangled in others' self-interests
- Disconnected from God's love
- In a hurry

Selah prayers slow our pace, creating sacred pauses in our day. These pauses teach us emotional presence with God, who is always ready to love and guide us. They clear the chaos in our lives, making room for awareness of God's presence and openness to His Spirit.

HOW CAN WE PRACTICE SACRED PAUSES

We can embrace this spiritual discipline in the ordinary transitions and moments of our lives:

- Arriving a little early to meetings and events
- Praying before going to bed each night
- Walking slowly outside to appreciate the beauty of nature
- Taking deep breaths and praying before responding to challenges
- Saying thank you when someone blesses us
- Writing down worries and offering them to God in prayer
- Turning car travel time into a sanctuary for God
- Setting aside lunch breaks for silent reflection and prayer
- Praying whenever we hear of someone's need (Matthew 11:25)
- Creating a gratitude journal to record blessings amid challenges
- Praying while waiting in line
- Meditating on a Bible verse while brushing our teeth
- Singing a praise song to God in the shower
- Praying for peace before engaging in difficult conversations
- Practicing forgiveness and praying for those who have caused us harm
- Engaging in acts of kindness and silently praying for those we encounter

BEST PRACTICES FOR SACRED PAUSES

The spiritual discipline of sacred pauses works best when combined with other spiritual practices. Clearing away the clutter in our souls creates space for Jesus to dwell more fully within us. We can invite Him in by practicing these disciplines:

1. Silent Prayer

In a world filled with constant noise and information, silent prayer is a rare but vital practice. When we embrace moments of silence, we create sacred pauses that allow us to offer our scattered thoughts and emotions to God and center ourselves in His presence.

2. Selah Prayer

Instead of rushing through Bible reading, we can pause like the Psalmists did. Taking a moment of Selah during Scripture reflection allows us to savor and pray over God's Word, cultivating a deeper connection with Him.

3. Morning Prayer

Our first words of the day can set the tone for everything that follows. Instead of rushing to check our phones or worrying about our to-do lists, we can take a Selah moment to pray:

- "Jesus, I love you."
- "Thank you, Lord, for this day."
- "God, I dedicate this day to serving you."
- "Our Father in heaven..." (Matthew 6:9-13).

4. Enjoying Nature

Spending time in nature refreshes our souls. Howard Thurman teaches us the importance of caring for the soul, reminding us to intentionally seek moments that nourish our inner being. Whether it's appreciating a tree, listening to birds, or marveling at the sparkle of snow, these Selah moments remind us of God's beauty and creativity (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

5. Breath Prayer

Centering ourselves with a short phrase or Scripture, like "Peace! Be still" (Mark 4:39), helps us ground our spirits during transitions or challenges.

6. Visual Devotions

Using our imagination to place ourselves in a Bible story deepens our engagement with God's Word. These Selah moments allow us to be emotionally present with Scripture.

7. Stations of the Cross

Reflecting at each of the 14 Stations of the Cross offers sacred pauses to meditate on Christ's journey of love and sacrifice.

MINDFULNESS STEPS FOR SELAH

We can enhance our Selah practice with four mindfulness techniques using the S.T.O.P. acronym:

- **S: Stop** what you're doing for a minute or more.
- **T: Take** a deep breath to become emotionally present in the moment.
- **O: Observe** your thoughts and feelings without judgment.
- **P: Pray** about your needs or actions with focused intention.

(Adapted from Meditation of the Heart by Dr. Howard Thurman, St. Ignatius Loyola, and Shepherding by Gill Gaultiere)