# SELAH

Loved to Love
Five mornings, September 21 to 25

**MONDAY** LOVED FIRST.

**TUESDAY** SEEN FROM A LONG WAY OFF.

**WEDNESDAY** MET AT YOUR WORST.

**THURSDAY** ROOTED.

**FRIDAY** HELD TOGETHER.

*Each morning has a place to write. A notebook works. So does the notes app on your phone. Ten minutes is enough.*

NW Hills
CHRISTIAN CHURCH

# SELAH

## LOVED FIRST.

*(Write your answers down)*

### STOP

Yesterday we said love is the trunk and everything else grows out of it. This morning that is going to get tested, because the week has already started making demands and none of them are about love. Stop anyway. This is the first of five mornings, and the only thing required of you right now is to sit still and let God have ten minutes before anyone else gets any.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down before you move on.

### EXHALE

Breathing is the one thing your body does both ways. It runs without you all night, and it also does exactly what you tell it to. That makes it a good place to start a prayer. Something already given to you, that you are now choosing on purpose.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

*As you inhale, pray, "You loved me first, God..."*

*As you exhale, pray, "...before I knew your name."*

## LOOK

John wrote this as an old man. He had leaned against Jesus at a table and he had watched him die, and by the time he wrote this letter almost everyone who could say the same thing was gone. He is not arguing here. He is telling you what he knows. Read it slowly, two times, before you go on.

> *God showed how much he loved us by sending his one and only Son into the world so that we might have eternal life through him. This is real love—not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to take away our sins.*
>
> **1 John 4:9-10 NLT**

## ASK

God loved you before you did one thing about it. That is not a nice way of putting it. That is the order, and John says getting the order right is the difference between real love and the counterfeit.

Notice what John does not say. He does not say God was angry and needed somebody to absorb it. He says God loved us, and then he says what that love went and did: it took the sin away. The sacrifice is God dealing with what was killing us, at his own cost, because he wanted us. Not a payment God required. A rescue God performed.

- John says the love came before anything you did. Is that the order you actually live in, or do you find yourself

trying to get God's attention first?

- He writes “this is real love,” as though he expects you to be carrying around a different definition. What definition do you think he is correcting?
- Where this week are you acting like God's love for you depends on how the week goes?

Write a short prayer naming one thing you have been quietly trying to earn from God, and hand it back to him.

Or, if love is a word that has been used carelessly with you by somebody who should have meant it, write a prayer asking God to show you what he means by it.

## HEAR

Now stop talking and listen. The obstacle this morning is that most of us have already decided what God would say if he said anything. We know the verse he would quote and the thing he would tell us to work on, so we never actually wait. Set that down. Let him say whatever he is going to say. You can start with a simple prayer: “I'm listening for you, God. Speak to me.”

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

# SELAH

## SEEN FROM A LONG WAY OFF.

*(Write your answers down)*

### STOP

Second morning. The first one is easy because it is new. The second one is the one you have to decide about, and you already did, because you are here. That counts for more than it feels like it does. Do not spend the next ten minutes evaluating how yesterday went. Just start.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down before you move on.

### EXHALE

You cannot breathe ahead. There is no way to take in enough air this morning to cover the afternoon. It comes one at a time, which is inconvenient for people who like to get things handled in advance. Let that be the point for the next two minutes.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

*As you inhale, pray, “Father, you saw me coming...”*

*As you exhale, pray, “...you ran the whole way.”*

## LOOK

Jesus told this story to people who were complaining about the company he kept. That is the setting. They thought he was too easy on the wrong sort of person, so he told them about a father. Read it slowly, two times.

> *But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him. The son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy to be called your son.' But the father said to his servants, 'Quick! Bring the best robe and put it on him. Put a ring on his finger and sandals on his feet. Bring the fattened calf and kill it. Let's have a feast and celebrate. For this son of mine was dead and is alive again; he was lost and is found.' So they began to celebrate.*
>
> **Luke 15:20-24 NIV**

## ASK

God saw you coming while you were still a long way off. He did not wait at the door with his arms folded to see whether you meant it. He ran.

One thing before the questions. The father in this story is God. It is not a promise about how your own family will turn out. Some of you have been watching a road for a long time, and this story does not tell you when or whether anybody is coming up it. What it tells you is what God is like when somebody does, and what he is like toward you this morning.

- The father was already watching, which means he had been watching for a while. What does it do to you that he saw his son before his son ever arrived?

- The son had a speech prepared and never got to finish it. When you come back to God, what speech do you usually have ready?
- Who in your life is a long way off, and what would it actually cost you to start watching the road for them again?

Write a prayer for one person you have stopped watching the road for.

Or, if you are the one a long way off this morning, skip that and write a prayer telling God plainly where you are.

## HEAR

Sit still and listen. The obstacle today is that most of us come to God with one question we want answered, and we are so focused on that one thing that we talk over everything else he might be saying. If you have a question this morning, ask it, and then let it go and pay attention to whatever actually surfaces, even if it has nothing to do with what you asked.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

# SELAH

## MET AT YOUR WORST.

*(Write your answers down)*

### STOP

Wednesday is the morning nothing is special about. Monday has momentum and Friday has the finish line, and this one just sits in the middle. That makes it the most honest day of the five. Whatever you bring in this morning is probably closer to your actual life than what you brought Monday.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down before you move on.

### EXHALE

Most people rush the exhale. We take a good breath in and then let it go in a second and a half so we can get on with things. Do the opposite this morning. Let the out-breath take longer than feels natural, and notice what your body does when it is not being hurried.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

*As you inhale, pray, “Christ came while I was weak...”*

*As you exhale, pray, “...he did not wait for better.”*

## LOOK

Paul does arithmetic in this passage. He takes the very best version of human love, the kind that would actually die for somebody, and he sets it next to God's love to show that they are not in the same category. Read it slowly, two times.

> *You see, at just the right time, when we were still powerless, Christ died for the ungodly. Very rarely will anyone die for a righteous person, though for a good person someone might possibly dare to die. But God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.*
>
> **Romans 5:6-8 NIV**

## ASK

God did not wait for you to become someone worth it. Paul's word here is demonstrates. He is not explaining a mechanism. He is pointing at the cross and saying, that is what God's love looks like, and look at when he did it.

- Paul says Christ came at “just the right time,” and then tells you the right time was when we were powerless. Why would that be the right time?
- He says even dying for a good person is rare. Who is the hardest person in your life to imagine loving at their worst?
- Where are you still trying to present God with a tidied-up version of yourself before you talk to him?

Write a prayer telling God one true thing about where you actually are this morning, without cleaning it up first.

Or, if the word sinner puts a wall up for you, write a prayer asking God to show you what he sees when he looks at you.

## HEAR

Be quiet and listen. The obstacle this morning is that we throw out the ordinary thought. Something surfaces that seems too plain or too obvious to have come from God, so we discard it and keep waiting for something that sounds more impressive. Do not discard it. Write it down and decide later.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

# SELAH

**ROOTED.**

*(Write your answers down)*

## STOP

Day four is the one people skip. There is one more after this, the week is nearly done, and it would be easy to tell yourself you have basically gotten the point already. You have not, and neither have I. Sit down anyway.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down before you move on.

## EXHALE

The first breath is usually the shallowest. Give it three or four before you decide whether any of this is working. Your body takes a minute to believe you actually mean to slow down.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

*As you inhale, pray, “Your love is deeper than I know...”*

*As you exhale, pray, “...root me down into it.”*

## LOOK

This is not an argument. Paul has been building a case for three chapters and here he stops and prays for these people instead. You are reading somebody's prayer for a church he loved, and it works just as well prayed over you. Read it slowly, two times.

> *so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the Lord's holy people, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.*
>
> **Ephesians 3:17-19 NIV**

## ASK

Paul prays that you would be rooted in love. Not aiming at it. Rooted in it, the way a tree is in the ground. Love is what you stand on, not what you are trying to produce.

- If love is the ground under you rather than the goal ahead of you, what changes about how you go into today?
- Paul says you grasp this "together with all the Lord's holy people," not by yourself. Who has helped you understand God's love in a way you could not have gotten to alone?
- He prays you would know a love that "surpasses knowledge." Where have you settled for knowing about God's love instead of knowing it?

Write Paul's prayer for yourself, in your own words.

Or, if you feel like the least rooted person you know this morning, write a prayer asking God to put your roots down anyway.

## HEAR

Now listen. The obstacle today is boredom. Sometimes you sit in the quiet and nothing happens, and it is tempting to decide that means the whole thing is a waste. It does not. Most of what God does in people is slow, and slow feels like nothing while it is happening.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

# SELAH

## HELD TOGETHER.

*(Write your answers down)*

### STOP

Last one. Before you start, look back at Monday. We said God loved you first, before you had done anything about it, and every morning since has been another angle on that same sentence. Whatever this week actually held, none of it changed the thing God has been saying to you since Monday.

- What's on your mind? Notice your thoughts. Is there a distraction that you need to set aside for a few minutes during this quiet time? Is there something specific you feel God is asking you to pay attention to?
- What's on your heart? What are you carrying into this space? A specific emotion, a person, a weight you didn't realize you were holding?
- Describe how you currently feel in just one word.

Write your answers down before you move on.

### EXHALE

You have done this four mornings in a row now. Your body knows the pattern, so use it. Let the first slow breath be the signal that everything else can wait for ten minutes.

If you find it hard to focus, count slowly to four as you breathe in and slowly to six as you breathe out, letting the count steady your pace.

*As you inhale, pray, “Dress me in what you are...”*

*As you exhale, pray, “...let love hold it together.”*

## LOOK

Paul wrote this to a church that was not getting along. That matters, because he does not tell them to feel differently about each other. He hands them a list of clothes and tells them to get dressed. Read it slowly, two times.

> *Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.*
>
> **Colossians 3:12-14 NIV**

## ASK

Love is what holds the rest of it together. Paul says it plainly in verse fourteen, which is the same thing we heard on Sunday about the trunk. Pull love out and the other things on that list come apart in your hands.

One thing before the questions. Paul writes "forgive as the Lord forgave you," and that line has been handed to people in situations it was never meant for. Forgiving somebody is not the same as trusting them again, and it does not mean returning to a person who is hurting you. Those are two different decisions, and Paul is not making the second one for you here.

- Paul says who you are before he says what to wear: chosen, holy, dearly loved. Why do you think he puts it in that order?
- Verse fourteen says love binds the rest together. Which item in verse twelve falls apart fastest in you when love goes missing?

- Who this week needs you to put something on that you do not currently feel?

Write a prayer naming one thing from Paul's list you are going to put on today, and one person you are going to wear it for.

Or, if forgiveness is the word that stopped you this morning, write a prayer telling God how hard it is, and leave it there for now. You do not have to resolve it today.

## HEAR

One more time. The obstacle at the end of a week like this is expecting it to add up to something. You may be waiting for the five mornings to produce a conclusion, and they might not. That is fine. God is not running a course with a final exam. Sit still and let him have the last word instead of summarizing it for him.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.