SELAH

Whatever the Forecast
Five mornings, September 28 to October 2

MONDAY GIVEN PEACE.

TUESDAY SUNG OVER.

WEDNESDAY KEPT.

THURSDAY FILLED.

FRIDAY INVITED.

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

GIVEN PEACE.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

Yesterday we said joy doesn't check the forecast. This morning you probably checked it anyway, along with your email, your calendar, and whatever came in overnight. That's alright. Put all of it down for ten minutes. This is the first of five mornings, and nothing out there is going to fall apart while you sit still.

- 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

Peace often starts smaller than we expect. Before it's a settled heart, it's usually a body that has stopped rushing. You can't talk yourself into peace, but you can slow your breathing and give God room to work.

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 give me your peace, Jesus..."

As you exhale, pray, "...so my heart can rest."

LOOK

Jesus said these words at the same supper where he told his disciples, “In this world you will have trouble.” He was hours away from his arrest. Nobody in that room was calm, and he knew it. Read it slowly, two times, before you go on.

> *Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.*
>
> **John 14:27 NIV**

ASK

Jesus gives you his peace. He doesn't lend it and he doesn't sell it. He says it's a gift, and a different kind than the world hands out.

One thing before the questions. “Do not be afraid” is not a scolding. John tells us that earlier that same night Jesus himself was troubled in spirit (John 13:21). The one saying these words knows exactly what a troubled heart feels like. He isn't telling you to stop feeling it. He's telling you what he gives you while you do.

- Jesus says he does not give “as the world gives.” What kind of peace does the world offer, and what does it usually cost you?
- What is troubling your heart this morning? Name it plainly.
- What would it look like today to receive his peace as a gift instead of trying to produce it yourself?

Write a short prayer handing Jesus the thing you named, and asking for his peace in the middle of it.

Or, if peace feels impossible right now, write a prayer telling Jesus exactly that. He can handle an honest prayer.

HEAR

Now be still and listen. The obstacle this morning is noise, and not only the kind around you. Most of us carry a steady hum of reminders, messages, and half-finished thoughts. You don't have to silence all of it. Notice it, let it pass, and come back. You can start with a simple prayer: “Jesus, I'm here. I'm listening.”

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

SELAH

SUNG OVER.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

Second morning. Yesterday was new. Today you had to decide, and you did. Don't grade yourself on how Monday went. God isn't keeping that kind of score this morning, and you don't need to either.

- 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

Try something simple today. Before you begin the count, let one breath out longer than you normally would, as if you're setting down something heavy. Then start.

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, "The LORD delights in me..."

As you exhale, pray, "...and sings over me today."

LOOK

Zephaniah spends most of his short book warning his people about judgment. It's hard reading. Then, near the end, after all of that, this is where the book comes to rest. Read it slowly, two times.

> *The LORD your God is with you,*
> *the Mighty Warrior who saves.*
> *He will take great delight in you;*
> *in his love he will no longer rebuke you,*
> *but will rejoice over you with singing.*
>
> **Zephaniah 3:17 NIV**

ASK

The LORD takes great delight in you. Not in a better version of you someday. In you. Zephaniah says he rejoices over you with singing.

If you've ever pictured God as mostly disappointed in you, this verse is worth sitting with for a while. It doesn't say God pretends there's nothing to correct. It says his love has decided not to rebuke you.

- Zephaniah calls God “the Mighty Warrior who saves” and then says he sings over you. What do you make of those two pictures side by side?
- Is it easier for you to believe God puts up with you than to believe he delights in you? Why?
- Sunday we said joy comes from what God has done. How would it change your day to know that God's own joy includes you?

Write a prayer thanking God for one specific way you have seen his care for you.

Or, if delight is the last word you would use for how God sees you, write a prayer asking him to show you what

Zephaniah saw.

HEAR

Now listen. The obstacle today is that kindness can be hard to receive. When a quiet thought comes that sounds gentle toward you, many of us wave it off as wishful thinking and wait for something more critical. Don't be so quick to dismiss it. God is allowed to be kind to you.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

SELAH

KEPT.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

Wednesday. The week is half gone and half left, and by now the things you set down on Monday have probably picked themselves back up. That's normal. You don't have to pretend the week isn't happening. You only have to stop for these ten minutes.

- 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

Anxiety speeds up your breathing before you notice it's there. That's how bodies work, not a sign of weak faith. Slowing your breath is one of the simplest ways to tell your body it's safe to be still. Take your time with it today.

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, “Lord, you are my Rock...”

As you exhale, pray, “...keep my mind on you.”

LOOK

These lines come from a song. Isaiah pictures God's people singing it about a strong city whose walls God himself provides. It's the kind of song you need most when the walls around you don't feel very strong at all. Read it slowly, two times.

> *You will keep in perfect peace*
> *those whose minds are steadfast,*
> *because they trust in you.*
> *Trust in the LORD forever,*
> *for the LORD, the LORD himself, is the Rock eternal.*
>
> **Isaiah 26:3-4 NIV**

ASK

God keeps you. The words translated “perfect peace” are, in Hebrew, simply “peace, peace.” It's the word we talked about on Sunday, shalom, said twice for emphasis.

One thing before the questions. “Those whose minds are steadfast” can sound like a test you're failing if you live with anxiety. It isn't. A steadfast mind isn't a calm mind. It's a mind that keeps coming back to God, even if it has to come back a hundred times a day. Anxiety is not proof that you don't trust him. Bringing it to him, and getting help when you need it, is what trust looks like.

- Isaiah calls the LORD “the Rock eternal.” What are you leaning on right now that feels a lot less solid than a rock?
- Where does your mind go when you're not steering it? Where would you like it to go?
- What is one small way you could bring your mind back to God in the middle of today?

Write a prayer naming the thing your mind keeps circling, and asking God to keep you in his peace around it.

Or, if your mind feels anything but steadfast this morning, write a prayer asking God to hold on to you while you can't hold on very well.

HEAR

Now be quiet and listen. The obstacle today is rehearsing. When things get quiet, an anxious mind tends to replay conversations or run through what might go wrong. If that happens, don't fight it. Notice it, hand it to God, and come back to the quiet. You might pray, “Lord, keep my mind on you.”

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

SELAH

FILLED.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

Day four. You're starting to get the hang of this, which is good. It can also turn into a routine you go through without paying much attention. So be intentional this morning. Sit down on purpose.

- 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

Your lungs can only take in air after they've let it out. You can't fill up on top of full. Let each breath go all the way out before the next one comes in, and think about what God might want to fill once there's room.

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, “God of hope, fill me...”

As you exhale, pray, “...with joy and peace today.”

LOOK

Paul wrote this near the end of a long letter to a church he had never visited. After pages of hard argument, he stops and prays a blessing over them. Christians have prayed it over each other ever since, and this morning it's being prayed over you. Read it slowly, two times.

> *May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*
>
> **Romans 15:13 NIV**

ASK

God fills you with joy and peace. Notice who does the work in this verse. The God of hope fills, and the power belongs to the Holy Spirit. Like we said Sunday, you can't grit your teeth into joy. The Spirit grows it.

One thing before the questions. “As you trust in him” doesn't mean joy is a reward for trusting well enough. And if you're walking through depression, hear this plainly: it is an illness, not a spiritual failure. Sometimes joy isn't a feeling at all. Sometimes it's something you hold on to as true while the feeling is gone. That still counts.

- Paul calls God “the God of hope.” What would change if you started your day thinking of God that way?
- Paul prays that you would “overflow with hope.” Who around you could use some of that overflow this week?
- On Tuesday we read that God delights in you. How does that fit with this blessing for you?

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

Or, if you feel empty this morning, write a prayer telling God so, and asking him to fill what you can't.

HEAR

Now listen. The obstacle today is waiting for a feeling. You may sit in the quiet expecting to feel full, and nothing much happens. That doesn't mean God isn't at work. The Spirit's work is usually slower and quieter than a feeling. Stay a while anyway.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.

SELAH

INVITED.

(Write your answers down)

STOP

Last morning. Look back over the week. On Monday Jesus gave you his peace. On Wednesday we heard that he keeps you. Every morning since has said the same thing a different way. Whatever this week actually held, none of it changed that. Sit with the week for a moment before you 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've done this four times now, and your body is starting to know the rhythm. Use it. Let the first slow breath be your way of saying yes to God one more time this week.

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 made room for me...”

As you exhale, pray, “...help me make room for others.”

LOOK

Today is the last day of Sukkot, the Festival of Tabernacles. Jewish families have spent this week eating meals in little shelters, remembering how God cared for Israel in the wilderness. This is the passage where God tells his people how to celebrate it, and who has to be at the table. Read it slowly, two times.

> *Be joyful at your festival—you, your sons and daughters, your male and female servants, and the Levites, the foreigners, the fatherless and the widows who live in your towns. For seven days celebrate the festival to the LORD your God at the place the LORD will choose. For the LORD your God will bless you in all your harvest and in all the work of your hands, and your joy will be complete.*
>
> **Deuteronomy 16:14-15 NIV**

ASK

You were invited. God told Israel to make their festival joyful, and he was specific about who had to be included: servants, Levites, foreigners, the fatherless, and widows. The foreigner was on the guest list from the beginning. Like we said Sunday, we didn't take this over. We got let in.

One thing before the questions. Verse 15 ties joy to a blessed harvest, and it's easy to hear that as a promise that faithful people always get good harvests. That isn't what it says. It describes a festival held after the harvest was already in. And on Sunday we heard Habakkuk say he would rejoice even if the fig tree didn't bud and the fields produced no food. The joy of the LORD doesn't wait on the harvest.

- Look at the list in verse 14. Who on that list would you have been, if you had been there?

- Who in your life right now has nothing prepared, and how could you bring them into something good?
- Sunday's sermon said joy seeks company. What would it look like to share your joy this weekend instead of keeping it to yourself?

Write a prayer thanking God for making room for you, and name one person you will make room for this week.

Or, if you have been the one left off the list lately, write a prayer telling God how that feels, and asking him to show you where he has made room for you.

HEAR

One more time. The obstacle at the end of a week like this is thinking the practice ends when the pages do. It doesn't have to. Ten quiet minutes can go with you into next week without anybody handing you a page. For now, sit still and let God have the last word.

Whatever comes into your mind, write it down.