

*“Oh, say does that star-spangled banner yet wave”*

Have you ever thought – what on earth is spangled? Millions of people will sing those words this July 4<sup>th</sup> without a second thought about its definition.

Many of us, just like we’ve grown up in America, we’ve also grown up in Church. For some of us it’s like living in an echo chamber where we have used some of the same words like salvation, grace, or blessed again and again and again without pausing to reflect on what they mean.

Others of us- if we’re brutally honest with ourselves- our relationship with God doesn’t define us in our day to day decisions, so how you define words like salvation, grace, or love don’t matter all that much to us.

### **The definition of our words can make a world of a difference.**

The poet Christian Wiman asked the question that stirred the pot for this series:

*“Does the decay of belief among educated people in the West precede the decay of language used to define and explore belief, or do we sense the fire of belief fading in us only because the words are sodden with overuse and imprecision and will not burn?”*

Recently the **Journal of Positive Psychology** researched something very different - our **words**. They took 50 Biblical terms associated with moral virtue, as used in millions of books, newspapers, and materials published from 1500 to 2008 kept in a massive database by Google. **74%** were used less frequently over the last century. Most by about **50%**. The use of most of our religious words was cut in half.

Jesus said humans can’t live be bread alone but by the nourishment that comes from God’s Word. These words are vessels of spiritual knowledge and nourishment. And yet in many ways we’re starving ourselves of the life within them. We’re spiritually malnourished by our own doing.

### **Proverbs 18:21 – words can bring death or life!**

We often make this verse about the totality of our words and what comes out of our mouth. But what about *each* word?

This series isn’t about **redefining**, but returning to the words and elevating definitions that have remained shallow or altogether dormant. It’s all about giving Biblical words life again by reclaiming the definitions that we no longer consider, and the words we no longer use.

This week: **PRAYER** and **TWO** words that add depth to its definition.

Tim Keller : *“There are other prayers in the Bible but no other place where you have an entire course of theology in prayer form, and no other place where you have every possible heart condition represented, along with the way to process that situation before God. Even the Lord’s Prayer is more a summary of what we must pray—while the Psalms are a comprehensive program in how to pray it.”*

## PSALM 62

I went in **Starbucks** recently, opened my laptop and threw on my noise cancelling headphones to drown out the Rihanna and other Top40 hits that are usually blasting and got to work. I don't know how much time passed before I realized it, but it was silent. Their system had broken. It was down for a few days. And I basked in it.

How wild is it that silence is so rare that when we come across it, it grabs our attention and can stop us in our tracks?

We need more silence in our life.

I'm not talking about the silence of exhaustion and resignation that inevitably comes when we crash at the end of a long day I'm talking the silence of renewal. The proactive silence that prevents the burnout.

**Psalm 62** opens with verse 1:

*Truly my soul silently waits for God; from Him comes my salvation.*

David writes of being verbally assaulted by his enemies, who aim to topple him like a tottering fence. NLT – *“So many enemies against one man – all of them trying to kill me.”*

David's prayers in his Psalms rage and cry out for vengeance.

David's prayers give God praise.

David's prayers ask to receive God's help.

David's prayers cry out again and again for help and deliverance in times of need.

This is the beauty of the Psalms. David keeps it real.

Prayer isn't all measured and calm and polite. And God can handle that.

*“Pour out your heart to God”* – David encourages us in verse 8.

Somewhere in my decade of following Christ I was first introduced to the acronym - **“ACTS”**

Adoration –GIVE to God our praise.

Confession –ASK for forgiveness for your sins.

Thanksgiving – GIVE God thanks.

Supplication – ASK for provision.

Give and take. Followed by more give and take.

There's nothing inherently wrong with this.

Jesus asks us to ask, seek and knock. He asks us to be persistent in it.

It's absolutely part of our reason for praying.

So much of the discourse in our culture boils down to, you're wrong, I'm right, and this is why. I'm not here to topple your definition of prayer. But I believe our definition is often lacking the depth that God desires, and the high definition that scripture would give it.

The Word Prayer carries the power of life and death. Our definition often lacks life and depth.

Right here in our Bible, in Psalm 62, is a word we often read over and don't give a second thought:

## **SELAH**

In my New Living Translation it says - "INTERLUDE" – a pause between acts of a play. Why?

Selah is a word whose definition is elusive. Some say it means forever. Why is it used in the Psalms? It's a musical direction meaning to pause between verses. Stop and think about that. Let it marinate.

A pause for contemplation.

A pause from speaking or singing.

A pause of pregnant silence.

Between selahs is this complete thought, one I want us to "SELAH" tonight, to stop and think about. It's verses 5-8:

*My soul, wait silently for God alone, For my expectation is from Him.*

*He only is my rock and my salvation; He is my defense; I shall not be moved.*

*In God is my salvation and my glory; The rock of my strength, And my refuge, is in God.*

*Trust in Him at all times, you people; Pour out your heart before Him; God is a refuge for us*

*Selah*

Much like the Psalm as a whole, this section starts with silence.

NLT - "ONLY in God is my soul silent" (vs 5)

That only is notable.

Where do you go for renewal when you're feeling stressed and surrounded?

Distraction?

We think and say - "*What I'd do for some peace and quiet...*"

How often, when we get the chance, are we actually comfortable in silence?

How often is peace and quiet replaced with monitors of all sizes and the distraction that comes with it?

This isn't some new problem brought about by smartphones and social media.

**Blaise Pascal** – 17<sup>th</sup> Century theologian, in observing the culture around him, said:

*"Take away their diversion and you will see them dried up with weariness... it is to be ushered into unhappiness as soon as we are reduced to thinking of self and have no diversion."*

He said elsewhere – "*I have discovered that all the unhappiness of men arises from one single fact- that they cannot stay quietly in their own chamber.*"

We don't deal well with silence.

It's crippling our relationship with God.

**T. David Gordon**, a professor of Religion at Grove City College, says:

*"The Scriptures commend meditation on God's Word and reflecting on truths, which require a certain affinity for solitude. If the digital world trains people to find solitude itself off-putting, then they can't have much quality time with God."*

**“Create in me a pure heart”** is David’s prayer in Psalm 51.  
His prayer is a key one, as Jesus says himself in Matthew 5:8:  
**“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.”**

In our church culture, we often equate the word purity with sexual purity.  
What if purity is speaking as much to the clarity as it is to cleanliness?  
What if it isn’t just about what’s unclean, but also keeping our lives uncluttered?  
Purity in the purest sense of the word can speak to what is **clear** vs. what is **cloudy**

Joe McNally - **“Busyness is the enemy of clarity.”**  
But as we’ve stated the virtues of our age are hyper-connectivity and multi-tasking,  
not solitude and meditation. Tech keeps us stirred 24/7. Reacting. Stimulated. Responding.  
As we embrace hyper-activity this more and more, we forfeit clarity for cloudiness.

We need **SELAH**.  
We need interludes between the busyness.  
Why? We need clarity. We need purity. Or we won’t see God because our lives become cloudy.

We don’t pause long enough for the sediment to settle and the water to become clear,  
or sit still long enough for the sediment to settle and water to get clear.

A question we should ask ourselves again and again and again in our digital age:  
*Could it be that God feels distant not because he’s distant, but because you’re distracted?*

**Teresa of Avila** once put it bluntly – “God is not really silent. We are deaf.”  
While we aren’t deaf in any permanent sense, we are certainly distracted into deafness often.  
We need to SELAH. Press pause.

### **Psalm 131:2**

*“I have calmed and quieted myself,  
like a weaned child who no longer cries for its mother’s milk.  
Yes, like a weaned child is my soul within me.”*

What is a weaned child in David’s culture? A 3-4 year old.  
Look- I have a child smack dab between 3 and 4.  
He’s a ball of energy. Constant motion. And sheer enthusiasm.  
A three to four year old will certainly express themselves.  
Like Psalm 62’s cries for justice, cries of pain, a child will make those cries with no hesitation.

The moments that are rare but beautiful and some of my favorite as a father?  
When Raj is calmed and quieted.  
When he is calm, quiet, and resting on my chest or in my arms.

Raj is nonverbal. No words are spoken. No words are needed. It fills my tank as a father.  
It speaks to my heart again and again about the heart of our Heavenly Father.  
How much does he long to simply spend time with his sons and daughters? Words or no words.

I love that just a couple books later in our Bible, God promises what David cashed in on: Isaiah 66:13 - *“As a mother comforts her child, so I will comfort you.”*

These two words, SILENCE and SELAH, will transform our prayer lives if we let them. Because while our definition of prayer isn't wrong in most cases, it's often shallow. And as a result so is our prayer life.

## **TRANSACTION**

vs

## **RELATIONSHIP**

### **MATTHEW 6:7-8**

*When you pray, don't babble on and on as the Gentiles do. They think their prayers are answered merely by repeating their words again and again. Don't be like them, for your Father knows exactly what you need even before you ask him!*

We get two big truths here:

God is sovereign.

Prayer matters.

But a common question, one I've asked myself: *if God already knows what you need—why pray?*

This question reveals a lot about our perspective of prayer.

It reveals a lot about our culture's effect on us.

And- scarily- it reveals a lot about our relationship with God.

In our Western Culture we value prayer. We practice the acronym ACTS. Give and Take. And more Give and Take. And we often pray with the perspective that its chiefly about two things: GIVING and GETTING

It boils down to transaction. Requesting. Praising. Asking. Thanking.

It fits neatly into the rest of our lives in our Western Culture where so much is a matter of transaction. Give and take in prayer becomes an extension of a life lived with the perspective of doing for God so that He will do for us.

**Prayer becomes an extension of us DOING for God and God DOING for us,  
Rather than simply BEING with God.**

Again- my point is not to say prayer ISN'T **transactional**.

But what we often miss out on is **relational**.

And it's keeping our prayer from being **transformational**.

Again - I can't tell you how much my non-verbal three year old has taught me about prayer. To put it blunt - maybe I just need to shut up. Practice more SELAH and silence.

### **Ecclesiastes 5:2**

*Do not be hasty to speak, and do not be impulsive to make a speech before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.*

Be more like Raj. Just BE.

Be more like Psalm 131

***“Like a weaned child – calmed and quieted – is my soul within me.”***

With all of the takes about what Jesus meant about coming to him like a child... could this be it?

Calm.

Still.

Quiet.

Like a weaned child to his parent.

I'd argue this trust and relationship should come **first**.

In Psalm 62 the silence comes before the pouring out.

David speaks in depth about how he relates to God as his rock, salvation, defense, and refuge before he ever gets to asking.

I think that's key and even foundational to prayer.

Because for many prayer is first and foremost about the transaction.

As a result the most common issue that arises with prayer among those in the church in my experience- by far – is when we ask God for something and we don't get the YES or the answer we wanted.

Because prayer is transactional, but not relational.

**But it's when you trust him as Father that you will find peace in his answers.**

Steph and I have prayed countless tear-filled prayers at the ceiling as she's walked through chronic pain and her degenerative condition. Trust me - sooner or later you've prayed for it so much and for so long you run out of words. And it seems like the words you've prayed have hit the ceiling, fallen to the floor, or died in your mouth. Feelings go numb. Or altogether haywire. Prayer seems silly. A self-delusion. A divine trick.

Sometimes it isn't my silence that troubles me.

It's God's.

What do you do when God seems silent?

Some walk away. For some it breaks their faith.

This is often the lesson we learn like Job.

We want God to give us answers. God wants to give us himself.

I have to ask myself in moments where I don't get the answer I wanted:

*have I been pursuing prayers for results or relationship?*

Author and pastor Jani Ortlund put it more beautifully than I could:

*In the silence, in the waiting, patience chooses to declare, 'Lord, I love you. I know I don't love you as I ought, but I want to love you more than your answer to my prayers.'"*

It's when you trust God first as Father that you will find peace in any answer. Even silence.

It's when you know him as Father that you can pray as his only Son, Jesus Christ did, sweating blood in the Garden not getting the answer he wanted to "take this cup from me"...

***"not my will, but your will be done."***

Meanwhile the disciples fell asleep in the silence. Keeping in prayer for a couple hours. Who has two to three hours of transactions to pray about? After a while the words run out. But relationship? That never ends. Even in silence.

As much as we may complain about God's seeming lack of presence, God has much more reason to complain about our lack of presence.

*"First forgive the silence that answers prayers,  
Then forgive the prayer that stains the silence."*