

SUMMER SERIES – HIGH DEFINITION – JUDGES 12:4-6

Recently the **Journal of Positive Psychology** 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.

Now I think if we're honest, some of us are simply apathetic about these words because religion hasn't meant much to us, whether we would readily admit it or not. Our relationship with God doesn't define us in our day to day decisions or doings, so Biblical definitions and usage of words like salvation, grace, or love don't matter all that much to us.

Others of us? Many of us live in an echo chamber, these religious communities where we have used some words like salvation, grace, or blessed again and again without pausing to reflect on what they mean.

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?"

JUDGES 12:4-6

The Gileadites were fighting the Ephraimites, and they seized the fords of the Jordan River and thoroughly spanked the Ephraimites.

However, many Ephraimites snuck across these fords with the regular travelers.

So the Gileadites developed a password. It was a linguistic password.

“shibboleth”

It was a common word, meaning “ear of grain” or “flowing stream”

If you could pronounce it correctly, you were allowed to pass.

If you couldn't, you were exposed as the enemy.

The Ephraimites, for whatever reason, pronounced it “sibboleth”

So the Gileadites used it to distinguish friend from foe.

And LIFE or DEATH hinged on this seemingly throwaway word.

Proverbs 18:21 says “*words can bring death or life!*” ...and in this case it was literal.

It's reported by historians that in the World War II, German soldiers identified Russian Jews by the way they pronounced the word for corn: "kookoorooza."
Their distinct pronunciation exposed their background.

Go back further in history, and in the Gospels, right after Jesus' arrest and before Peter's denials, Peter's pronunciations out him as a disciple of Jesus, and others at the fire are quoted in Matthew as saying, "*you must be one of them, we can tell by your Galilean accent.*"

The language we use matters. ...and not just in simple pronunciation.

For instance - the English language isn't tied to cardinal direction (NSEW), it's relative.
Left and right. Over and under.

As a result if I ask you to point north right now you'd have to think about it, find the sun or guess

Aboriginal languages are tied to the cardinal directions, a fork is North of a plate instead of to the left, so a child as young as grade school always knows which direction is which.

The languages we speak influence our worldview. Our perception. Our behavior.

That same power lies in individual words.
Not just "shibboleths" that reveal us to the world.
Words that reveal God and the world he created to us.

"*Words are windows.*" And the window with which we see the world should be shaped by God's Words. It should be divinely inspired and supernatural... it should be a **higher definition**.
But often we don't see the world in high definition because our spiritual vocabulary we see it through and its definitions are shallow, lacking, or absent

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.

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?

When we lose the depth of our spiritual vocabulary, or when words like liturgy and lament, creed and confession, fade or altogether disappear from our vocabulary - we won't just lose words.
We lose power. We lose worship. We lose LIFE.

Hebrews 4:12 – "For the word of God is alive and powerful."

The proof is in the first pages of our Bible. God creates the world with words.
And in his last act of the Creation account he creates man in the imago dei, the image of God.
We're the one creative being with the ability of language.

Darwin's *Origin of Species*.

Language almost toppled his theory from the start. Why?

Because language transcends natural selection. Language transcends the need for survival.

And over a century later, science still bows to the gift of language. There's no natural explanation for man's use of words to reason, to communicate, and to speak life.

Language is a divine gift.

We're made in the image of God.

The God who used words to create life.

Jewish people understood the life in words.

The fruit of movements like Greek philosophy and the Enlightenment is to define and distinguish and dial in. But Jews didn't treat words in the Hebrew language as dialed in and defined.

Within it words were pliable. Jews approached them with imagination.

As a result, words and meanings were multi-faceted and complex.

Words in the Hebrew language often have many meanings, not one.

To the Jewish people some definitions may not even be tapped into yet.

(Mind you this was the native tongue of the Bible and the people that put it into text for us!)

This may sound wild to our time and culture.

We all grew up with **dictionaries**.

When we needed to know what a word means, we turn here.

But consider this: the first dictionary wasn't published until the late 1500s.

Most of human history went without them.

The Word of God is alive and powerful

And the words and vocabulary we use to speak about it carry the power of LIFE.

But biblical words have been translated and...if we aren't careful... become fixed and shallow.

That's why the **Amplified Version** of the Bible is a personal favorite.

And not because it's easy to read. It's anything but. It's choppy.

Example: **Philippians 4:13** - *I can do all things [which He has called me to do] through Him who strengthens and empowers me [to fulfill His purpose—I am self-sufficient in Christ's sufficiency; I am ready for anything and equal to anything through Him who infuses me with inner strength and confident peace.]*

Not the easiest read. It isn't perfect either.

But it keeps me thinking like the Jews did.

The definition may go deeper than it first appears. It's probably deeper than it is shallow.

It keeps me using my imagination.

Not in to change the truth. But to chase the truth.

Deuteronomy 6:5 - *LOVE the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength...*

This verse is important and pivotal enough that Jesus himself repeated it as one of the greatest commands in all of scripture. It's a pivotal truth to understand.

But the word **LOVE**...

We get our ideas of love from RomComs, from our music, and from relationships. Love in our culture is all about feelings of infatuation and butterflies and alike.

But the Hebrew word for "love" has many meanings, one which comes from a term used to describe enforced loyalty to the dominant party. It means obedience. Not just following your feelings, but an act of exercising your will.

That verse comes into a higher definition when I examine the definition of love.

The way I see God comes into a higher definition.

The way I see myself comes into a higher definition.

In this series we'll do this in a bigger scale with other words...

"Love" would slide into what I'd call the **Inigo Montoya Tier** –

"You keep using that word. I do not think it means what you think it means."

These words and how we define them effect how we live and how we see God.

Another group of words that have atrophied or been left for dead.

Liturgy. Creed. Lament. Selah. Those 50 Biblical terms from the research we into'd with.

A take-home application:

JOHN 1 reads: **In the beginning was THE WORD.**

One word came before all others.

One word is preeminent.

One word's definition is more important than all others ---- **GOD**

This word- like all others- paints our worldview.

It paints our perspective of self.

It paints our worship.

GOD – what do you think of when you think of God?

God doesn't define himself in scripture.

We get word pictures. Imagery. Analogies.

Shepherd. Potter. Father. Teacher. Silversmith. Lion. Bear.

What comes to mind when you think of Him?

AW Tozer - *What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us. ... Worship is pure or base as the worshiper entertains high or low thoughts of God. For this reason... the most portentous fact about any man is not what he at a given time may say or do, but what he in his deep heart conceives God to be like.*

What do you conceive God to be like?

A recent survey found that some 150 million Americans believe in an angry God.

The fruit?

We relate to God by walking on eggshells, not intimacy.

Within ourselves we operate in fear, anxiety, and compulsion.

And with others? Oh we see the fruit of this all the time. We're angry and offended by the sins of others. Because that's how God is with ours..... right?

What you think of God effects how you relate to Him, how you relate to yourself, and how your relate to the other billions of people on this planet.

But when you know God as compassionate, whose first impulse is love, whose mercy triumphs over judgment – that doesn't just change how you see Him – it changes YOU. It changes the way you walk with people. It changes the intimacy with which you walk with God.

May we never forget he's transcendent... but He's imminent.

Draw near to him, he draws near to you. (JAMES)

He's infinite... but he's intimate.

You will seek him and find him when you seek him with all your heart. (JEREMIAH)

Who is God to you? David was described in scripture as a man after God's heart.

I've been reading scripture's account of his life again this month.

I love his description of God toward the end of his life in 2 Samuel 22

He is my ROCK, my FORTRESS, and my SAVIOR.

My God is my ROCK, in whom I find PROTECTION.

He is my SHIELD, the POWER that saves me,

And my place of SAFETY.

He is my REFUGE, my SAVIOR,

The one who saves me from violence – my PEACE.

That's no flat definition of God.

Not to mention all David writes about God and his word through 150 chapters of Psalm.

Psalm 19:7&10

God's Word is perfect in every way;how it revives our souls!

...Nothing brings the soul such sweetness as seeking his living words.

Who is God to you? An idea? A figure? A power?

Or is he a person you relate with? A being you commune with?

We were created for relationship with Him. And nothing else comes close.

My heart for us this summer for all of us is we would pursue God through His Word more and more. This is a vessel a spiritual nourishment. We're a malnourished people.

May we fill our hearts, our minds, and our mouths again with His Word. Word by word.