

We Must Learn to Taste

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God doesn't play fair.

Much to my parents' concern, I hadn't been to church for a long time. And yet here I was, in my first term at university, sliding into a pew at St Ebbe's Church in Oxford.

This, I can promise you, was not the result of any pious yearning on my part. Rather, it was because the congregation counted among its number a particularly lovely second-year student of modern languages.

Where earnest parental pleading had failed, she had proved to be rather more convincing.

Stop Reading the Bible

Incidentally, or so it seemed, it was at St Ebbe's that I met Tony. Knowing that he was the student worker at the church, I politely agreed to meet him for a coffee one afternoon in his study.

It was underwhelming. We looked at a few paragraphs of the Bible together. Then he asked me to explain to him what I'd just read, because apparently even a person in his position can lack basic comprehension skills. Then he asked me how he could be praying for me. Finally, he wondered if I'd like to do it all over again next week. Presumably he was very lonely indeed, so I said yes, and the

routine continued throughout the winter, and into the spring.

That six-month stretch turned out to be the pivotal moment of my life. During those meetings, Tony taught me to stop reading the Bible. Or rather, he taught me to stop *merely* reading the Bible. He encouraged me to act on what I was reading. Trust it. Obey it. Put it into practice. Live it out, so that I would discover, in my own experience, that God's word was good. Even when (perhaps especially when) it cut across my deepest and most cherished desires and convictions.

This, I discovered, is what it meant to "taste and see that the LORD is good."

Taste and See

How unsettling that the Bible puts it like that. If the psalmist had said, "See that the LORD is good," we might comfort ourselves with the delusion that God could be observed at a safe distance. But we must *taste* in order to see.

Tasting can't be done remotely, at arm's length, or by proxy. Tasting is impossible without coming close to the food in question and opening ourselves. It requires that we pick something up, put it into our mouths, onto our tongues, and swallow it so that it goes deep into the darkness, and then changes us so that — whether we like it or not — we are no longer quite the people we once were.

For years, the Bible had been telling me to "*taste* and see that the LORD is good." For years, I had been gawking at a plate of food and hoping that the act of staring would fill me up. I somehow expected to know God without "tasting" — without allowing his word to invade me, nourish me, and change me.

Not Just Knowing About, But Knowing

The Bible is not a distance learning program. It's not primarily for knowing *about* God, but for *knowing him*.

One of life's saddest ironies is that many who know the Bible do not know its Author. This is a grand and tragic exercise in missing the point — along the lines of a drowning person catching a flotation device, and then using it to make a hat.

A.W. Tozer was right:

The Bible is not an end in itself, but a means to bring men to an intimate and satisfying knowledge of God, that they may enter into him, that they may delight in his Presence, may taste and know the inner sweetness of the very God himself in the core and center of their hearts.

Meet the Author

By the time Easter arrived, I knew when I sat down in Tony's overstuffed armchair that I wasn't doing it for his benefit.

I had been introduced to, and now knew, Jesus Christ. The one through whom and for whom all things had been created. The one who knew me and had set his loving kindness upon me, before he attended to the small matter of speaking the universe into existence. The one whose humility and tenderness had directed the nails into his own limbs, the spear into his own side. *That* God had put his

pierced arms around me.

Sadly, the relationship with the modern languages undergrad didn't work out. But in its place, another love, infinitely satisfying and entirely unexpected, was beginning to bloom. At twenty years of age, I was finally learning to taste.

More on the Bible:

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