

“Taste and See: Savouring God’s Presence”
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Psalm 34:1-8

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Please click [here](#) to read the Scripture.

I don’t savour a Dorito.

I don’t evaluate a Dorito’s body. I don’t sniff a Dorito’s bouquet. I don’t let a Dorito roll in my mouth, or dance on my tongue.

I don’t pick the appropriate serving vessel to go with the particular flavour; right from the bag will do. I don’t match it with the perfect meal. I don’t worry about how it is plated

I don’t savour a Dorito. I munch it, crunch it, and consume it. I guzzle and vacuum it in. I go all “Cookie Monster” on a Dorito.

But never just “a” Dorito. One goes in, and is quickly calling its friends to follow. I oblige. My relationship with a single Dorito is short-lived and promiscuous. It’s dysfunctional, for both of us.

I don’t savour a Dorito.

I savour good food. I savour food that’s worthwhile, nourishing and delicious. I savour food that’s well-sourced and prepared with care. I savour food shared with good company.

It’s not just food we savour. We can savour a sunrise, a symphony, a snowfall. We can savour the smell of a baby’s head.

Savouring gives time. Savouring lingers. Savouring relaxes. Savouring focuses. Savouring gives attention. Savouring appreciates. Savouring delights, enjoys, relishes.

We can savour God’s Presence.

II

“Taste and see how good God is.”

That beautiful invitation ends the part of the Psalm we read today. It beckons us to experience and dwell into God’s presence. It’s a physical, sensory invitation to the spiritual: taste and see, taste and know, savour.

The Psalm-singer might have been King David,¹ and it could be anyone. It can be us. They have been stuck in hardship and suffering, terror and trouble, shame and danger. They have cried out — trusting faith cries to God. God heard them! They have experienced God's rescue, God's deliverance, God's salvation.

"Taste and see how good GOD is."

This is very important. Experiencing God is not simply having a sense of an unphysical presence. Things in the physical world can deceive us. Same with the spiritual. What did Scrooge say when encountered by Marley's ghost? The ghost asks why Scrooge doesn't trust his senses. *"Because,"* said Scrooge, *"a little thing affects them. You may be an undigested bit of beef, a blot of mustard, a crumb of cheese, a fragment of underdone potato."*² A spiritual experience can be deceptive, or worse. So we need to discern: is it the presence of God I'm experiencing?

First, look at what God does. God delivers, rescues, and saves. This is the One told of in the Bible. If what we experience is leading us away from the Scriptures' witness to God, then it is not God we are experiencing.

Second, depend on each other. We need each other to figure this out. The Psalm sings: *"Magnify the Lord with me! Together let us lift his name up high!"* God gives us each other. Yes, we experience God personally, and it might be when we are alone. Still, we need each other to figure out what God is saying to us.

That's important, but back to the invitation. *"Taste and see how good God is."* Find your refuge in God who delivers, rescues and saves. Know you are held by God. Your life comes from God. You can rest in God. God delights to be with you. Savour God's Presence. *"Taste and see how good God is."*

III

Let me introduce you to someone. His name was Nicolas Herman, but he came be called Brother Lawrence. He lived over three hundred years ago in France. He was born in poverty, had little education, worked as a soldier, then a servant. Then he became a lay brother in a monastery in Paris. Like the monks, lay brothers took vows, lived and worked in the monastery, but they focussed on the less "religious" things, the

¹ The traditional superscription credits this psalm to David, "when he pretended to be crazy before Abimelech, who banished him so that he left." However, there are significant problems with this attribution. See Water Brueggemann and William H. Bellinger, Jr., Psalms, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 170f and Ellen T. Charry, Psalms 1-50 (Grand Rapids: Brazos, 2015), 180f.

² Charles Dickens, The Annotated Christmas Carol, Michael Patrick Hearn, ed., (New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1976, 2004), 40f.

day-to-day tasks that kept the place running. Lawrence worked in the kitchen. Later, he made shoes. His work was very ordinary.

People noticed Brother Lawrence. They noticed he lived every day constantly alive to God's Presence. People came or wrote to him for wisdom. After he died, they gathered his teachings and letters. This collection, The Practice of the Presence of God, is a classic.³

What was his secret to practising the Presence of God?

He just did it.

Stitching shoes or stirring a pot, he just did it.

Lawrence didn't have special knowledge. He didn't develop a series of steps.⁴ Private retreats didn't work for him.⁵ Living alive to God's Presence is available to anyone, everywhere. Where did Lawrence practice it? In a kitchen and at a cobbler's bench.

Listen to something he wrote in a letter:

I gave up all the devotions and prayers that were not required [for a lay brother], and I devoted myself exclusively to remaining always in [God's] holy presence. I keep myself in his presence by simple attentiveness and a general loving awareness of God . . . a quiet and secret conversation of the soul with God that is lasting.⁶

Again, he just did it! He stayed aware, and available, and attentive to God. He savoured God's Presence.

Listen to some more:

My most typical approach is this simple attentiveness and general loving awareness of God, from which I derive greater sweetness and satisfaction than an infant receives from his mother's breast. Therefore, if I may dare use the expression, I would gladly call this state the 'breasts of God,' because of the indescribable sweetness I taste and experience there.⁷

³ Brother Lawrence's has been called a "methodless method." Conrad De Meester, Writings and Conversations on the Practice of the Presence of God, trans. Salvatore Scieurba (Washington, DC: ICS Publications, 1994, 2015).

⁴ Ibid, xxxvii.

⁵ Before entering the monastery, he attempted life as a hermit.

⁶ Ibid, 57.

⁷ Ibid, 58. This imagery was inspired by Song of Songs 8:1 (see note 9 in Meester).

A nursing infant is savouring. Lawrence was savouring God.

IV

Last week, I talked about sensing God's Presence. God can use physical sensations — things we take in through seeing, hearing, touching, tasting, smelling — to enliven a sort of "spiritual sense" we have that tells us God is with us.

When we know we are in God's Presence, we can savour it.

Remember, savouring gives time. Savouring lingers. Savouring relaxes. Savouring focuses. Savouring gives attention. Savouring appreciates. Savouring delights, enjoys, relishes.

There is no secret to savouring God. It is enjoying the moment with God. When you are cooking, you are cooking with God. When you are working, you are working with God. When you are playing, you are playing with God. Driving along, God is with you. Walking bundled against the cold, God is with you. Struggling over something, God is with you. Laughing, God is with you. Weeping, God is with you.

You don't need to escape from everyday life. You enhance the everyday by savouring God while you're living it.

You don't need to stop work to pray. You infuse your work with a mindfulness that God is with you.

You don't need to set aside responsibilities. You engage them with joy and passion and commitment, savouring God's Presence as you do.⁸

Savouring is simply giving time, lingering, relaxing, focussing, attending, appreciating, delighting, enjoying, relishing.

Surely the Presence of God is in this place, and wherever I go.

Help me to notice.

Help me to savour!

⁸ Much of the material in this section, and inspiration for this entire sermon, comes from Larry Doyle's sermon "Savouring Presence." It is included in the appendix of Lawrence Price Doyle, Coram Deo: The Presence Project Doctor of Ministry Project Report (Columbia Theological Seminary, 2016), 108-112.