

**Preparation**

See the 'Conclusion' at the end of this study. You'll need to prepare something to eat if you choose to 'share something tasty'.

Most of us take our ability to taste for granted, but as with every function of our bodies, the mechanism by which it happens is an astonishing testimony to our Creator's handiwork.

How do we taste something? In very simple terms, when we put food in our mouths, our saliva dissolves it and carries the solution to our taste buds, mostly on our tongues. This dissolved food passes through pores on the tongue and hits taste receptors, below which are taste receptor cells (these make up our taste buds which are of different types, can change shape, and live only three to five days before being replaced). These receptor cells in turn send signals along three of the nerve channels which connect straight into our brains at the point where the brain is designed to recognise taste. That's the moment when, by the combination of sweetness and sourness, bitterness and saltiness (and perhaps 'umami' or savouriness), we consciously taste and can recognise (and hopefully enjoy!) what's in our mouths. It sounds simple, but each step in this process is so complex that we still understand only a small part of it. Once again we come back to the words of Psalm 139: We are 'fearfully and wonderfully made' (verse 14).

**Discussion**

- Imagine what life would be like without taste. What difference would it make to you?
- Talk about some of the ways that God's gift of taste is a blessing.
- On the other hand, what are the ways that taste can have a negative dimension? To get you started read Genesis 3:6; 25:29-34 (with Hebrews 12:16) and Luke 4:3,4.

In the Bible 'taste' of course is used in the literal sense. We are told in the proverb that 'honey from the comb is sweet to your taste' (Proverbs 24:13), Isaac asks his son Esau to prepare for him 'the kind of tasty food I like' (Genesis 27:4), and the man in charge at the wedding in Cana 'tasted the water that had been turned into wine' (John 2:9). But the more important usage is metaphorical, where the word is given a spiritual twist. Perhaps one of the most famous examples is Psalm 34:8 – 'Taste and see that the Lord is good.' The two meanings are brought together by Jesus at his crucifixion, where he tastes wine mixed with gall (Matthew 27:34) and tastes death for everyone (Hebrews 2:9).

We'll look at the metaphorical use in a moment, but first **read Colossians 2:16-23**. This passage touches on the literal meaning of taste and contrasts legalism and freedom. The legalism is linked with following certain rules (verse 16) and denying ourselves certain pleasures, including the pleasures of taste (verse 21). Paul, the author of Colossians, condemns this attitude, but elsewhere he says, 'I beat my body and make it my slave' (1 Corinthians 9:27), which suggests a life of self-denial.

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### Discussion

- What do you think is the right balance for a Christian between denying and enjoying life's pleasures? What are the outcomes of going to one extreme or the other?
- Can you think of examples where the church, or people you know, or you yourself, need to recover the biblical balance?

We're now turning to some of those Bible passages that use taste as a metaphor for human experience, and to start we'll look briefly at Psalm 34:8 that we've already quoted, 'Taste and see that the Lord is good.' Read Psalm 34:4-10. The title of this psalm places it in the events of 1 Samuel 21:10-14 where David goes to live among the Philistines, Israel's traditional enemies. It was a dangerous situation but he 'sought the Lord' and the Lord 'delivered' him (verse 4).

### Discussion

- Think about the idea of taste to describe an encounter with God. What are the similarities between our experience of taste and our experience of God? What help does this give us in talking about God to others?
- How do David's experiences in verses 4 to 7 prepare him to speak verse 8? Is it the same for us?
- Now **read 1 Peter 2:2-3**. What is the next step after 'tasting' God? What advice would you give to new Christian to help them in this next step? Share some of your own successes and struggles.

Finally we come to the most profound use of the word taste in the Bible; its application to the death of Christ. Jesus 'suffered death,' the writer of Hebrews tells us, 'so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.' **Read Hebrews 2:5-18** and then consider:

- What did it mean for Jesus to become 'like his brothers in every way' (verse 17)?
- What does it mean that Jesus tasted death for everyone and is 'now crowned with glory and honour' (verse 9)? How have these things changed life for you and for the whole world?

### Conclusion

You might like to finish by sharing something tasty to eat among your group. After everyone has eaten, conclude with a brief prayer thanking God for the gift of taste and for the gift of spiritual taste, and that through the death of Christ we can 'taste and see that the Lord is good', and go on enjoying him for ever.