

TASTE



SEE

A PRAYER WALK

Created by
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INTRODUCTION

There are quite a few foods and flavors mentioned in the Scriptures. From manna in the desert to Jesus saying “I am the bread of life,” eating was not only a significant part of life, but often the Scriptures use food to make a deeper connection. The meals themselves become metaphors for spiritual fullness, for dependence on God’s provision and even for Jesus’ sacrifice. Expressions like “Our daily bread” and “salt of the earth” still carry far more meaning than just what is edible. We’ve developed this Taste & See Prayer Experience to explore some of those flavors and the meaning they’ve carried through the years in various expressions. While a few of the same items are used in both Taste & See and in a traditional Seder meal, this prayer experience is meant to be different. You can use Taste & See any time during the year, it’s especially effective after a corporate fast. It’s our hope and prayer that you enjoy the Taste & See Prayer Experience and we’d love to hear how it went. You can find us on Facebook, Twitter and Pinterest ([@USAEastSLD](#)). Enjoy the flavors of Scripture!

This is the last flavor you’ll experience in these stations. Note the lightness, the fruitiness and the flavor of the sparkling grape juice. It’s refreshing and rejuvenating. It’s life-giving.

Is your salvation, your relationship with Christ like this? Is it life-giving? Is it celebratory? Is it something that is appealing and pleasing to your friends and family? Is it something that draws others toward you, and toward Christ?

SPARKLING GRAPE JUICE

The third and final agricultural symbol for Israel is the grapevine. It wasn't some random crop that Jesus used to describe the Father and Creator of the universe, it was the life of Israel and its deepest metaphor.

There's so much to the idea of the grapevine and the vineyard and its importance to the identity of Israel that I can only begin to uncover it in a few paragraphs here.

When Israel leaves Mt. Sinai after God's big appearance (considered to be the 1st Pentecost, and the basis for the traditional Jewish wedding ceremony, by the way.) they head up to the edge of the Promised Land. They send spies into the land (Numbers 13) to check it out. Twelve spies go in and even though God promised them that this land would be theirs, only two of the spies come back with any sort of optimism. Joshua and Caleb return to the Israelite camp eager to take God up on his promises. The other ten return with the worst of news. There are stories of giants and great armies and fortresses and the ten spies are enough to convince Moses and the elders to retreat. (This is why Israel is banished to the desert for forty years and why Moses isn't permitted to enter the Promised Land at the end of his life, you can read more in Numbers 15:20-35.) BEFORE all that happens, however, some of the spies come out of the land with a massive grape cluster. This thing is so big that two men have to hang it on a pole and carry it between them. (Numbers 13:23) It's the size of a person.

Even though they are banished from the Promised Land for an entire generation, this massive bunch of grapes is so significant and symbolic to them. Let's start at the end of the process for a clearer understanding of the significance.

Wine = celebration. Thus Jesus turns the water into wine at the wedding in Cana. Like the metaphor of the bread, Jesus says that his blood is the wine. His blood is our celebration, our ticket to the great party that God has for his kingdom.



HONEY

"Good and sweet." There's a tradition with Rosh Hashanah (Jewish new year) to dip an apple in honey and the benediction that goes along with the practice says "God grant us a good and sweet new year." It's not redundant, the adjectives "good and sweet" mean separate but connected things. "Good" refers to our own spiritual state of being. "God keep us holy" or "God keep us right" would be other ways to express it. "Sweet" is an experiential word. Our prayer is that God would lead us to enjoy our lives as His children and to taste deeply His blessings for us.



Honey is a natural sweetener, it's not produced or manufactured. It's a raw product. The Hebrew word for raw is "chai." Another way that "chai" is translated is "life." Life is raw, isn't it? Life, at its best, cannot be produced or manufactured. When we add levels and layers, we lose out on the best of that raw and natural life. Our best and most transformational experiences with God, in community, and as individuals are the raw ones that come with no processes or procedures.

There's a process to honey that is very much like our own spiritual growth. A date, or some flowered plant, must be planted in the ground at the right time and under the right circumstances for growth. That date seed must be watered and cared for during its most tender and vulnerable moments, when the seedling pokes up through the ground and its leaves unfurl toward the sun. The trunk grows stronger to support the growing tree and branches. Finally flowers emerge, both the beginning of new potential date trees and the source of ancient near-Eastern honey. The bees must collect the pollen and then return to the hive to create the honey.

There are many steps that must take place before we can actually taste the honey just as there are many steps in our growth and understanding as Christ followers. Seeds must be planted and nurtured in the right circumstances. Our vulnerability must be known and considered. We must grow stronger in anticipation, preparation to give life. We then bloom with beauty and a pleasant aroma and can help to bring more life to the world. God has made it so that that life, the sweetness that we are meant to be can be made even sweeter, even more life-giving.

Of those steps, which are you?

Who are those that have nurtured you in your times of growth? That have been there for you in your vulnerable moments?

What are you doing in your life to continue to grow?

HORSERADISH



Bitterness is a foul taste that grows within us, often small and manageable at first, but once planted, the seeds of bitterness can ruin the entire harvest of our lives or our circumstances. During the Seder meal, bitter herbs “maror” are consumed as an intentional experience of discomfort.

Why would we “want” to experience discomfort? What does that accomplish? Shouldn’t we just focus on the “good” things? Why dwell on the negative when God has so many positive things for us?

Rabbi Michael Gourarie says that “Complacency is the biggest block preventing spiritual growth.” He speaks of eating the “maror” not as a ‘reminder’ of slavery in Egypt, but to intentionally re-experience intense bitterness for ourselves. He calls the experience of the “maror” “positive bitterness” because through it, we can truly appreciate the journey from bondage to exodus, from slavery to freedom.

The spiritual experience of our lives is always a journey from slavery to freedom. And the tendency on that journey is to forget the bondage, to ignore the bitterness, to “stay positive.” Yet the scriptures are absolutely full of the entire spectrum of experience, slavery AND freedom, bondage AND release, death AND life. Read the Psalms, look at Jesus’ teaching, and read about the journey of the Israelites through the desert. You’ll never find the scriptures advising us to ignore those bitter experiences. In fact, when we do ignore them, we do not learn from them. When we do not learn from them, we are doomed to repeat them.

In his teaching on the “maror,” Rabbi Gourarie goes on to say “We need to have a healthy but strong sense of discomfort of where we are in order to have the desire and the yearning to be freer and grow further.”

When you taste the horseradish and intentionally re-experience the bitterness that goes with it, are you uncomfortable?

As that taste lingers, think of the ways in your spiritual journey that you are uncomfortable.

What are those for you?

Do you embrace the bitter moments? Or turn and run from them?

Now think of the ways that God has for you to grow, to move forward.

Journal as you feel led.

Tradition holds that one must eat enough of the bitter herbs to “bring tears to your eyes.” It’s up to you if you want to get that gung-ho or not.

SALT

Salt, like bread, has a community, or relational, meaning that we don’t usually learn about without really deep study. During long trips in the hot and arid environment of ancient near east, one didn’t have water bottles available for the trip. There were skins that could be filled with water, but you rarely transported them full. For one, water is heavy. Two as it warms up, especially stored in animal skins, it’s purity becomes suspect. Wine could be stored in skins for considerable lengths of time due to its acidity and resistance to bacterial growth. Water, however, is literally a haven for microbes once it spends any significant amount of time over 80 degrees.

So how do they deal with thirst? They plan trips around wells and natural springs. And they ate salt.

“But salt makes me thirsty!”

Yep. It also pulls water out of the body. While that sounds counter-intuitive, think about it. What keeps the saliva glands going better than anything? Salt. And then you swallow your spit. Then you make more spit. Then you swallow it. Then you make more and then you swallow it, constantly lubricating the throat and slowly adding necessary electrolytes (from the salt) to your body. Your mouth literally becomes something like a Gatorade factory, without all the fancy flavors.

On a trip, one traveler might offer another salt. Smith’s Bible Dictionary says that salt “symbolized hospitality; as an antiseptic, durability, fidelity and purity.”

Carrying this further is the idea of a covenant of salt, mentioned in Numbers 18 and 2 Chronicles 13, a sign of perpetual obligation, or a deep and loyal friendship on the level of “blood brothers”. Newborn babies were rubbed with salt as a cleansing practice. Disciples were called to “be the salt of the earth” for the same reason, to enhance and preserve the kingdom of God.

Jesus said that we, disciples, are the salt of the earth. Looking back at what salt symbolized, how do those words describe your life as a disciple.

How do you express hospitality?

How are you an antiseptic? That is, how do you fight infection or illness in the world?

How durable are you as a disciple?

Is “fidelity,” or faithfulness, a word that describes you?

Are you pure in your spiritual journey? In your obedience, in your explorations, in your following?



BREAD & OLIVE OIL PART 2

Another symbol for Israel is the olive. Jesus' favorite place to pray, incidentally, was an olive grove in Gethsemane. Throughout biblical and even modern history, Israel/Judea have been nearly wiped out and grown back from a remnant into a nation. This process has taken place over and over and over again.

The olive is a bitter fruit on its own. If you were to take an olive and squeeze it as hard as you can, you would not get olive oil, contrary to popular assumption. You would get a bitter white sap. To get olive oil, the olives must be pressed, not by fingers but by a substantial weight. Only then are the valuable oils within released.

Once released, olive oil is used in several sacred functions. The lamps of the temple burn olive oil, it's used to consecrate the elements of worship and to anoint people. The pressing is a complete and transformative act and what comes out is pure and perfect, ready to be used in worship.

The metaphor in olive oil holds truth still for those who practice the Jewish faith. They have been pressed beyond identification, crushed beyond recognition and still, they are ready for worship. Christ carries the metaphor even further on our behalf. Through the crucifixion, he wasn't even recognized by those that saw him next. Seen as a gardener at the tomb and as a stranger on the road to Emmaus and as a random dude on the beach in John 21, Jesus was something new after his death. And now, he is our light, he is our consecration and he is our anointing.

Dip a piece of bread in the oil. It's ok, this is not communion. It's as personal as you would like it to be, it's as holy as you let it be.

Taste the oil. Feel the deep warmth and taste it's earthy flavor. Think of the transformative moments in your life from which you emerged unrecognizable. Think of those times that you have been pressed and crushed by a great weight and have come through them purified and prepared for deep and real worship.

Maybe you're in such a time right now.



FIGS

The fig tree features so prominently in the Biblical story that it's specifically present in the garden of Eden when Adam and Eve sew the fig leaves together as clothes. It's the third tree mentioned, only preceded by "The Tree of Life" and "The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil." While much of Genesis 3 is punitive, covering themselves in fig leaves isn't a negative reference. It's very much a positive one as the fig tree itself is understood to be a sign of Promise, a reminder of God's good creation. Thus, the fig is one of three agricultural symbols for Israel. Figs are often associated with the Promised land as well as a sign of protection, prosperity and security. (1 Kings 4) Figs & pomegranates were brought out with the giant grape cluster as a sign of God's promise nearly fulfilled in Numbers 13. Jeremiah (ch. 24) is shown a vision with two baskets of figs, one good and one bad. And perhaps one of the more commonly known, yet misunderstood fig tree references is in Matthew 21 when Jesus curses the fig tree. A predominantly Jewish audience would hear of this, or read it and immediately make a connection that Jesus is cursing God's protection and blessing on Israel... more specifically, his protection and blessing on the religious institution. The tree was thriving, yet producing no fruit. Scholars tell us that part of the mystery of this is that the tree was "out of season" when Jesus cursed it and the expectation of fruit was unjustified. Perhaps the Jesus' subsequent overturning of the tables in the courtyards of the other national symbol (the Temple) is a parallel that God's chosen and holy nation should have no seasons and should instead ALWAYS be producing fruit.



As you eat the fig, chew slowly. You might find that the taste of the lingering horseradish is overcome by the sweetness of the fig. In the combination of these two flavors, the bitterness overcome by the sweet, we experience how God's goodness encompasses all that we experience.

Once the horseradish flavor disappears and you can truly enjoy the fig on its own, taste the depth of the fruit. It's a complex flavor, much like the grape or the olive where qualities of the soil and even rainwater are maintained in the fruit itself.

Can you identify the ways that God has moved, simple or complex, you from bondage (horseradish) to freedom (fig)?

What are the deep promises of God in your life?

Are you bearing fruit for God's kingdom in season? Or all the time?

BREAD PART 1

Bread is such a necessary element to life in the Bible, that the word itself became a metaphor for any kind of food. Grain was inexpensive and bread was easy to make. It dried quickly and the crust helped to preserve it, making bread a durable and portable meal. It was such a pervasive metaphor that even in the book of Ecclesiastes, it was proverbially used to refer to a financial investment, “Ship your grain across the sea; after many days you may receive a return.” (Ecclesiastes 11:1 NIV) Still today, you’ll find slang references to money that utilize bread, i.e. “dough.”

Bread is used over and over again as a sign of God’s providence. The manna in the book of Exodus was referred to as “bread from heaven.” You may remember that the manna was sent daily, to be collected only in amounts needed for that day. This was a reminder that Jesus echoed 3,000 years later in the Lord’s Prayer, “Give us this day, our daily bread.”

In Israel’s neighboring idolatrous communities, bread and other food was ‘demanded’ by the gods and worshipers had to leave loaves, fruits and vegetables at the altars to earn their favor. Exodus 25 and 29 refer to the bread on the Jewish altar, left there as a token of gratitude toward God, not to garner his delight or appease him. In fact, the priests are told specifically to burn the leftovers at the end of each day, another reference to God’s daily providence and our continued trust in his blessings.

In John 6, Jesus describes himself as “the bread of life” (v. 35) and at the last supper he refers to himself as the “broken bread.” Often taken to mean his body on the cross, broken for us, there’s another Jewish tradition hidden within the context.

When two people broke bread together and shared it, it was taken as a bond. Legal proceedings would end with the sharing of bread. Business deals would be closed over a loaf of the baker’s finest. Blessings would be shared among friends and sealed with the breaking and passing of the bread. You see, once you accepted the bread from the other, you were acknowledging that they were sharing God’s blessing and providence with you. You’re not only extending a tasty morsel, but sharing together in God’s desire for all people to be provided for. Even before the crucifixion, the passing of bread was a deeply spiritual act.

So in John 13, when Judas does not accept the bread from Jesus, that bond is not shared. In an act of deep offense, the betrayal begins.

Share bread with someone today. Take a piece and break it and give it to a good friend. Eat it together with joy and gladness in your hearts and celebrate one another. If you have an argument or falling out with someone this week, find some bread and then find them. Don’t let words or disagreements block you from God’s blessing of the sharing of your

lives. Break bread with an instructor this week to show your loyalty and gratitude to their willingness to be here and to participate in life with you this week. Break bread with a mentor, with a stranger, with a sibling, with anyone as a sign that you have been blessed with enough to share with another and as a sign that God’s blessings are for them, too.

