St Barnabas Cray

Taste Tov: Own God's Goodness, Volunteer

Weekly Devotional Journey

Monday - More Than 'All Good': Understanding God's Tov

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. (Psalm 34:8 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

We use the word 'good' so casually, don't we? We say the weather is good, the meeting went well, the food was good enough. But there is a kind of goodness that the English language simply cannot contain — a goodness so rich, so layered, so alive, that the ancient Hebrew writers reached for a different word altogether: tov.

Tov is not merely adequate. It is not a polite nod of approval. When God looked at the world he had made — the light separating from darkness, the seas pulling back to reveal dry land, the trees heavy with fruit, the creatures filling the earth with movement and sound — he declared it all tov. Beautiful. Thriving. Harmonious. Functional. Life-giving. Everything in its right place, everything working together as it was designed to.

This is the goodness that Psalm 34 is inviting us to taste. The psalm was written by David not in a moment of comfortable ease, but in a moment of genuine danger. Someone was trying to kill him. He was running for his life. And yet it was precisely in that desperate moment of vulnerability that he ran to God — and found him to be tov. Not just 'fine'. Not just 'helpful'. Profoundly, thoroughly, lastingly good.

This challenges us gently but firmly. We can so easily reduce our relationship with God to a transaction — a quick top-up when things get hard, a religious corner of our week that makes us feel slightly better about everything else. But tov goodness is not a flavour you can detect in a single sip. It is something you discover by lingering, by trusting, by returning again and again to the one who is the source of all goodness.

The invitation of Psalm 34 is not merely intellectual. It is experiential. Open your mouth and taste. Open your eyes and see. God's goodness is not a theological abstraction — it is something to be encountered, savoured, and lived within. The question is not whether God is good. The question is whether we have truly tasted it.

Reflection Question

When you think of the word 'good', what standard are you actually measuring by — your own expectations and desires, or the deeper, richer tov goodness that God defines and embodies?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"Tov means the beautiful, thriving harmony that God made for all things to work together, whether it's plants or trees or animals or fruit or food and people, all working together with everything as it should be."

Today's Application

Begin this week by deliberately slowing down your use of the word 'good'. Today, when you catch yourself saying something is good — a meal, a conversation, a piece of news — pause and ask: is this tov? Does this reflect beauty, harmony, and life as God intended it?

More importantly, take five minutes this morning to sit quietly and ask God to show you one place in your life where you have been settling for a pale, thin version of goodness — perhaps in how you treat your own soul, how you spend your time, or how you relate to someone close to you. Write it down. Don't rush past it.

Then, as a concrete act of trust, bring that one area to God in prayer and ask him to begin reshaping it according to his tov. This is not about self-improvement — it is about opening your hands and letting the source of all goodness have access to the places where you've been managing on your own.

Morning Prayer

Heavenly Father, thank you that your goodness is not fragile or conditional — it is tov, deep and lasting and true. Forgive me for the times I have reduced you to a quick fix or a religious routine, when you are inviting me into something so much richer. Today, help me to slow down enough to taste your goodness properly. Open my eyes to the beauty you have woven into this world, and open my heart to trust you more fully. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Evening Devotion

Lingering in Tov

Evening Reflection

As this day draws to a close, take a moment to look back over it with honest and gentle eyes. Where did you catch a glimpse of tov today — of something beautiful, harmonious, or life-giving? It may have been small: a shaft of afternoon light, a kind word from a colleague, a meal shared with someone you love. God's tov goodness is not reserved for mountaintop moments. It is woven into the ordinary fabric of daily life, waiting to be noticed by those who have learned to look.

But perhaps today also held something that was decidedly not tov — a frustration, a disappointment, a moment where things felt broken or out of place. David knew that feeling too. And his response was not to pretend everything was fine, but to run harder towards the God he had tasted and found to be good. The evening is a good time to practise that same movement — not tying everything up neatly, but bringing what is unresolved honestly to the one who is good even when life is not.

Rest tonight in this truth: God's tov does not depend on your day going well. He was good before the day began, and he will be good when it ends.

Evening Reflection

Where did you notice a flicker of God's tov goodness today, and where did you find yourself settling for something thinner than what God offers?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank you for this day — for the moments of tov I noticed and for the ones I may have missed. As I rest now, remind me that your goodness is not earned or occasional. You are good, and I am held. Amen.

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Tuesday - Taste: Trusting God with Your Whole Weight

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Now that you have tasted that the Lord is good, come to him, the living Stone — rejected by humans but chosen by God and precious to him. (1 Peter 2:3-4 NIV)

Devotional Thought

There are over 7,500 varieties of apple in the world. Sweet ones, sharp ones, crisp ones, floury ones. You can read about them. You can look at pictures of them. You can even smell them from across the room. But you cannot truly know which one you love until you bite into it. Tasting is irreducibly personal. It requires proximity, openness, and a willingness to commit to the experience.

This is precisely the image that Psalm 34 and Peter's letter both reach for when they speak of tasting God's goodness. Peter is writing to people who have heard the gospel — some of whom knew Jesus in the flesh, who walked with him, listened to him, touched him. And yet Peter does not assume that familiarity equals genuine tasting. He challenges them: have you truly tasted that the Lord is good? Because tasting, in this sense, is about trust. It is about running to God with the full weight of who you are and what you are carrying, and discovering that he holds you.

David wrote Psalm 34 from a place of real danger. He was not writing from a comfortable armchair reflecting on pleasant spiritual experiences. He was running for his life, and he ran to God. That running — that urgent, wholehearted leaning into God — is what tasting looks like in the crucible of real life. It is not a cautious, arms-length acknowledgement that God probably exists and is probably fine. It is the desperate, trusting throw of yourself upon his goodness.

Peter's challenge reaches us too. We can be extraordinarily familiar with the language of faith — the prayers, the hymns, the Bible passages — and yet be living at a careful distance from genuine trust. We can know about God's goodness without having truly tasted it. The invitation today is to close that gap: to move from knowing about God to leaning your whole weight upon him, especially in the places where you feel most vulnerable.

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Reflection Question

Is there an area of your life right now where you are managing carefully on your own, keeping God at arm's length, rather than truly running to him and leaning your full weight upon his goodness?

From Sunday's Sermon

"Taste in this sense is also about trust. Blessed are those who take refuge in him. You taste God's goodness by running to him, trusting him, leaning your whole weight on him, even or especially when you're vulnerable."

Today's Application

Today's application is about closing the gap between familiarity and genuine trust. Identify one specific area of your life where you have been 'managing' — perhaps a relationship that feels strained, a worry about finances, a health concern, or a persistent sense of inadequacy. You may have prayed about it briefly before, but have you truly run to God with it?

Set aside ten minutes today — perhaps during a lunch break or before an evening meal — and do something concrete: write a short, honest prayer about that specific thing. Not a tidy, polished prayer, but an honest one. Tell God what you are actually feeling. Then read Psalm 34:1-10 slowly and let it speak to you.

Additionally, consider who in your life might need to see what trusting God looks like. Is there someone you could encourage today — not with a religious platitude, but with a genuine word about how God has held you in a hard moment? Tasting is personal, but it is also meant to be shared.

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Morning Prayer

Father, I confess that I am more comfortable talking about your goodness than truly resting in it. There are places in my life where I am still trying to manage on my own, still keeping you at a careful distance. Today, help me to run to you — not when everything is sorted, but right now, as I am. Teach me what it means to lean my whole weight upon you and find you more than enough. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

Did You Taste Anything Today?

Evening Reflection

There is a world of difference between a protein shake gulped down between meetings and a meal you have been looking forward to all day — one that you sit down for, savour slowly, and linger over long after the plates are cleared. Both may nourish you in some sense, but only one is truly satisfying.

As you reflect on this day, ask yourself honestly: did you taste God's goodness today, or did you merely consume religion? Did you bring the real weight of your life to him, or did you keep things tidy and at a distance? There is no condemnation in that question — only an invitation to notice where trust came easily and where it felt hard.

Perhaps there was a moment today when you felt genuinely held by God — when a worry loosened its grip, when a conversation brought unexpected comfort, when a Scripture line rose up in your memory at just the right time. These are tasting moments. They are worth naming, worth thanking God for. And if today felt dry, that is honest too. Bring the dryness to him. He is good even in the desert places, and he meets us there.

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Evening Reflection

Looking back on today, where did you experience genuine trust in God — and where did you find yourself relying on your own resources instead?

Evening Prayer

Lord, thank you that you are patient with my slow and cautious trust. Tonight I bring you the places where I held back today, and I ask you to meet me there. Help me to taste your goodness more fully tomorrow. Amen.

Wednesday - Savouring God: More Than a Means to an End

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

Oh, how abundant is your goodness, which you have stored up for those who fear you and worked for those who take refuge in you, in the sight of the children of mankind! (Psalm 31:19 ESV)

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Devotional Thought

There is a profound difference between a meal you eat because you have to and a meal you genuinely savour. One is functional — it keeps you going, it fills a gap. The other is an experience of delight: the anticipation beforehand, the pleasure of each mouthful, the satisfaction that lingers long after the table is cleared. Both involve food. Only one involves joy.

This distinction maps directly onto how we can relate to God. It is entirely possible to engage with faith functionally — attending church when it suits us, praying briefly when we need something, reading Scripture occasionally to tick a box — without ever truly savouring God's goodness. We treat him as a means to an end: a source of comfort when things go wrong, a moral framework that helps us feel respectable, a weekly routine that gives shape to our calendar. But we have not truly tasted him.

Jesus confronted this exact pattern in the most religious people of his day. They knew the Scriptures with extraordinary precision. They could recite the law, debate its finer points, and observe its requirements meticulously. And yet Jesus looked at them and said, in effect: you have lost the joy. You have all the information and none of the delight. You search the Scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life, and yet you will not come to me that you may have life.

Savouring God means giving him our best — not just our spare moments and leftover energy, but our genuine attention, our first thoughts, our deepest longings. It means reading the Bible not to extract information but to encounter a person. It means praying not to manage God but to enjoy him. It means worship not as performance but as delight.

The good news is that God himself is the source of this delight. He is not withholding himself from us. The abundance of his goodness is stored up, as the psalmist says — not rationed, not scarce, but overflowing for those who come to him. The question is whether we will come with open hands and open hearts, ready to receive more than we thought to ask for.

Reflection Question

Be honest with yourself: in what ways have you been treating God as a means to an end rather than as someone to be genuinely known, enjoyed, and savoured?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"We savour God's goodness more than just look for him for a quick top up. And that includes giving him time, giving our best, giving ourselves to him, as well as receiving from him."

Today's Application

Today's challenge is about the quality of your attention to God, not just the quantity. Rather than adding more religious activity to your day, try doing one thing differently.

Choose one moment today — perhaps your morning reading, a lunchtime walk, or an evening prayer — and approach it with the deliberate intention to savour rather than consume. If you read a passage of Scripture, read it slowly. Read it twice. Ask: what does this tell me about who God is, not just what he wants me to do? Let yourself be moved by it.

If you find this difficult — if your mind wanders or the words feel flat — do not be discouraged. That dryness itself is worth bringing to God. Simply tell him: 'I want to savour you more than I do. Help me.' That honest prayer is itself an act of turning towards him.

Also consider: is there a practice you have been doing out of duty that you could intentionally approach with delight this week? Perhaps singing a hymn or worship song with genuine attention to its words, or sharing a meal with someone and thanking God for it with real gratitude rather than a perfunctory grace.

Morning Prayer

Lord, forgive me for the times I have treated you as a resource rather than a relationship, a function rather than a friend. You are not a means to an end — you are the end, the source and goal of all that is good and beautiful and true. Today, teach me to savour you. Give me eyes to see your goodness in the ordinary moments of this day, and a heart that lingers rather than rushes past. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Evening Devotion

The Meal That Satisfies

Evening Reflection

As the day ends, there is a gentle question worth sitting with: did you savour anything today? Not just the food you ate or the coffee you drank, but the moments of grace that God wove into the hours — the unexpected kindness, the quiet sense of being known, the beauty of something small and ordinary that spoke of a Creator who delights in his creation.

We live at such pace. The day fills up so quickly with demands and distractions that savouring — truly lingering over something good — can feel like a luxury we cannot afford. And yet Jesus himself withdrew from the crowds, sat at table with friends, paused to notice the lilies of the field. The Son of God, with the weight of the world's redemption upon him, still found time to savour.

Perhaps the invitation tonight is simply to resist the urge to rush into sleep, and to spend two or three minutes in genuine gratitude. Not a list of things you are grateful for in the abstract, but one specific moment from today that was genuinely good — tov — and to thank God for it by name. Let that goodness settle in you before you rest.

Evening Reflection

What was one genuinely good — tov — moment in today that you could name and thank God for right now?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for the goodness you scattered through this day, whether I noticed it or not. As I rest, help me to carry a savouring heart into tomorrow — one that is quick to notice your beauty and slow to rush past it. Amen.

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Thursday - Own It: Bringing the Not-Good Places to God

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God. (Micah 6:8 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

It would be a serious misreading of this week's theme to conclude that tasting God's goodness means pretending everything is fine. David, who wrote Psalm 34, knew better than that. He was running from an enemy who wanted him dead. He was not sitting in pleasant surroundings composing a cheerful song. He was in genuine danger, and he did not minimise it or dress it up.

What he did instead was refuse to stay in the trouble alone. He ran to God. And that running — that honest, urgent, unvarnished turning towards the source of all goodness — is what the second letter of our acrostic points us towards today. O is for own it.

Owning it means two things. First, it means being honest about the places in our lives where things are not tov — where there is brokenness, pain, disappointment, or sin. The prophet Micah makes clear that God's goodness is not a comfortable cushion that insulates us from reality. It is a call to walk humbly — which means walking honestly, without pretence, before a God who already knows what is true about us.

Second, owning it means acknowledging the ways in which we ourselves have chosen Ra over tov — the times we have trusted our own judgement rather than God's wisdom, the times we have acted unjustly, the times we have withheld mercy, the times we have walked proudly rather than humbly. The Garden of Eden narrative that the Hebrew word tov points us back to is a story about exactly this: the choice to define goodness on our own terms rather than trusting God's.

But here is the extraordinary grace at the heart of this: owning the not-good places is not an act of self-condemnation. It is an act of opening. When we stop pretending, when we stop managing our image before God, when we bring the real and unedited version of our lives into his presence, we make room for his goodness to do what only his goodness can do — heal, restore, forgive, and renew. Walking humbly with God means walking with him through the truth of who we are, trusting that his goodness is greater than our not-goodness.

Reflection Question

What is the 'not-good' thing in your life right now — whether a sin you have been avoiding confessing, a pain you have been managing alone, or a situation that feels beyond hope — that God is gently inviting you to bring honestly to him today?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"We need to own the fact where life is not good or where we haven't been good, where we haven't been tov, so we can open ourselves up more fully to God's goodness. Whether that be to forgive us for what is wrong, for bad choices, or to help us heal from being hurt by others."

Today's Application

Owning it is not a vague spiritual exercise — it requires specificity and honesty. Here is a concrete practice for today.

Find a quiet moment — even ten minutes will do — and take a piece of paper or open a journal. Draw a simple line down the middle. On one side, write: 'Places where I have not been tov' — things you have done or left undone, attitudes you have harboured, choices you regret. On the other side, write: 'Places where life has not been tov around me' — pain you are carrying, relationships that are broken, circumstances that feel unjust or hopeless.

Then, slowly and deliberately, bring each item to God in prayer. For the first column, ask for forgiveness and receive it — do not linger in self-condemnation. For the second column, ask for his presence, his healing, and his hope. You may wish to close by reading 1 John 1:9: 'If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.'

This is not a one-off exercise. Walking humbly with God is a daily practice of returning to honesty.

Morning Prayer

Lord God, I do not want to pretend before you. You already know what is true about me — the choices I regret, the pain I carry, the places where I have trusted my own judgement over yours. Today I bring it all to you, not because I have sorted it out, but because you are good and I am not beyond your reach. Forgive what needs forgiving. Heal what needs healing. And walk with me humbly through whatever today holds. In Jesus' name, Amen.

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Evening Devotion

The Relief of Honesty

Evening Reflection

There is something deeply releasing about telling the truth — about yourself, about your circumstances, about the gap between who you want to be and who you actually are. We spend so much energy managing our image, even before God, that the simple act of dropping the pretence can feel like putting down a heavy bag you had forgotten you were carrying.

This evening, reflect on whether you were able to 'own it' in some way today. Perhaps you brought something honest to God in prayer. Perhaps you had a conversation with someone in which you were more truthful than usual about how you are really doing. Perhaps you simply sat quietly and stopped performing.

Owning the not-good places is not weakness. It is, in fact, one of the most courageous things a person can do — because it requires trusting that God's goodness is bigger than your brokenness. David did not run from God when things were hard. He ran to him. And he found him good. That same God is waiting for you tonight, not with disappointment, but with the same tov goodness that has always been his nature.

Evening Reflection

Did you experience any sense of relief or freedom today from being more honest before God or with someone else? What did that feel like?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you that you are not surprised by what I brought to you today. Thank you that your goodness is not diminished by my honesty — it is the very place where your goodness gets to work. Hold me tonight in your grace. Amen.

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Friday - Volunteer: Passing the Goodness On

Morning Devotion

Today's Verse

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched — this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us. And our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1, 3 NIV)

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Devotional Thought

John's words in his first letter are remarkable for their physicality. Heard. Seen. Looked at. Touched. This is not abstract theology — it is the testimony of someone who has tasted something so real, so alive, so genuinely good, that he cannot keep it to himself. The goodness of God came in human form, walked among them, spoke to them, cooked breakfast on a beach for them. And John's response is not to hoard that experience but to pass it around.

This is where the week's journey arrives at its destination. We have reflected on what tov goodness means. We have explored what it means to truly taste it rather than merely sample it. We have considered the importance of savouring God rather than using him. We have been invited to own the not-good places honestly. And now we arrive at the final letter: V is for volunteer.

The image from the sermon is unforgettable: a young boy on the streets of Kolkata receives one ice cream for his birthday, and instead of consuming it privately, he shouts to all his friends, 'We've got ice cream!' — and passes it around until everyone has had a lick. He had so little, and yet the joy of having something good was so irresistible that sharing it was the only natural response.

This is the shape of Christian witness. Not a polished presentation. Not a carefully rehearsed argument. But the overflow of someone who has genuinely tasted God's goodness and cannot help but pass it on. John does not say, 'I proclaim to you what I have studied and concluded.' He says, 'We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard.' It is testimony — personal, embodied, relational.

Volunteering God's goodness means offering hope when someone is in despair. It means being generous not just with your spare resources but with your most treasured gifts and time. It means being willing to say, outside the walls of a church building, that you follow Jesus and that he is good. It is the most natural thing in the world — if you have truly tasted it.

Reflection Question

Who in your life needs to hear, see, or experience something of God's tov goodness through you this week — and what is one specific, concrete way you could offer that to them?

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From Sunday's Sermon

"Do we know that others taste and see that our lives are good because of what God has given us in all his goodness? That means being generous, but also sharing sometimes not just our spare stuff, but our most treasured things or gifts or talents or time in a way that gives life to others, even if it means being sacrificial."

Today's Application

Volunteering God's goodness is not reserved for those with the gift of evangelism or a particular personality type. It begins in the ordinary moments of ordinary days. Here are three concrete ways to practise it today and into the coming week.

First, identify one person in your immediate world — a neighbour, a colleague, a family member — who is going through something hard. Reach out to them today with a specific, practical act of kindness: a message, a phone call, an offer to help with something concrete. Do not wait until you feel ready.

Second, consider whether there is someone you could invite into community — to church, to a meal, to a conversation — who is on the margins of belonging. The 'we' mentality means actively making room for others at the table.

Third, and perhaps most challengingly: is there someone you could speak to honestly about your faith this week? Not a sermon — just a sentence. 'I've been thinking about what it means to trust God with the hard stuff.' 'I find that my faith really helps me when...' Volunteering hope is not complicated. It is simply the overflow of someone who has genuinely tasted that the Lord is good.

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Morning Prayer

Lord Jesus, you are the Word of life — heard, seen, and touched. You came not to be served but to serve, not to be known in private but to be proclaimed to the world. Thank you that your goodness is not mine to hoard. Give me the courage and the love to pass it around today — to speak hope where there is despair, to offer generosity where there is need, to be a living witness that you are good. Help me to volunteer your goodness freely, as one who has truly tasted it. In your name, Amen.

Evening Devotion

The Ice Cream Comes Back Around

Evening Reflection

The story of the boy and the ice cream ends with a detail worth sitting with tonight. The ice cream went around the whole group of children, lick by lick, and eventually it came back to Shane — the one who had given it away in the first place. Drippy, slightly melted, passed through many hands. And yet he received it back.

There is something deeply true about that image. When we give away God's goodness — when we volunteer hope, share our time, speak honestly about our faith, offer practical kindness — we do not lose anything. The goodness comes back around. Not always in the way we expect, not always immediately, but in the economy of God's kingdom, generosity is never wasted.

As this week draws to a close, take a moment to review the whole journey: tov goodness, tasting through trust, savouring rather than consuming, owning the not-good places, and volunteering what we have received. These are not five separate ideas — they are one integrated way of living. A life shaped by genuine encounter with a genuinely good God, expressed outward in love and generosity towards others.

You have been invited this week to taste and see. May you go into the weekend — and beyond — as someone who has tasted, and who cannot help but pass it around.

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Evening Reflection

As you reflect on this whole week, what is the one thing God has most clearly been saying to you — and what will you do differently because of it?

Evening Prayer

Father, thank you for this week of tasting and seeing. Thank you that you are tov — beautiful, life-giving, lasting, and true. Send me out from this week as someone who has genuinely encountered your goodness, and who carries it generously into the world. To your glory, and in Jesus' name. Amen.

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