

"For if the warhorn gives an indistinct sound, who will prepare for battle?"

1 Corinthians 14:8

WARHORN

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ABOUT FOOD

From an Editor

God could have had us absorb nourishment from the sun. He could have had our bodies get charged up by electricity. He could have had us subsist on mercury or iron or the color pink, if He'd wanted to.

Instead, He saw fit to have us put things into our mouths—lots of different kinds of things, things picked from trees or from the ground or parts of dead things that used to be living creatures—put these things into our mouths, and chomp these things into mush, using jagged rows of bone that protrude through our gums, and then swallow them, and send them plummeting into a dark gurgling abyss inside our belly, where nutrients are extracted which provide us with the life force we need to stave off the day when our own particular body, the vessel for all these wonderful mechanisms, becomes food itself, food for the ground.

Food is our subject in this issue, so let's start here: Food is odd. It would be odd enough if it were merely a biological function, mastication and digestion and elimination, a series of chemical reactions designed to provide our body with sustenance. But, like sex and death and blood and breath and so many other particulars of our animal nature, God is pleased to use food as more than just biology.

You only have to think of the varieties of food, each one with its purpose. Meat and wine for feasting, and bread and water for fasting. Sweets for wooing lovers and delighting children. The fruit of the harvest that can make a man strong, and the things plucked from dark and damp places that can strike him dead. There are foods designed for comfort, for admiration, for artistic excellence. Men work for it, they argue about it, some of them are enslaved to it.

Food is family. Food brings together generations of fathers and mothers and sons and daughters and uncles and aunts and nephews and nieces and grandparents and grandchildren and hangers-on and friends. Recipes are kept like secrets and passed down like heirlooms. Food is culture. Food is race. Food is identity.

Food is fashion. Food is diets and fads and doctors and frauds and supplements and books and wonder-drugs and home remedies.

Food is ritual. Every major holiday has its own rites of feasting. Every major religion has rules about food, or uses food in some part of its ceremonies.

Food is death. God gave our first father and mother a choice. They could eat life or they could eat death, both in the form of food. Food was their rebellion. They had looked into the face of God without shame. They had looked into the face of God and lived. Food was the pleasure they chose over this.

Food is life. Jesus Christ broke His body like bread, and poured out His blood like wine, and He commanded His followers to eat and drink in remembrance of Him.

Food is eternity. Jesus Christ is called the Bread of Life. The day of His victory will be the day of the Wedding Feast of the Lamb.

In short, food is a big topic. And, thus, in this issue of *The Warhorn*, we've put together one of our patented tiny scratches in an enormous surface.

I'm your maître d' this issue, because editor-in-chief Jake Mentzel is one of our chefs. He's serving up a wholesome but succulent dish on the nature of feasting. Your entrées today are courtesy of Mrs. Dani McNeilly and Mrs. Michal Crum, a purée of drama and self-doubt, with some mommy-guilt for added spice. And Mrs. Jenna Killingsworth provides our main course, a layered confessional of sin and sanctification—it's a little raw, but we think you'll find it filling.

If you go online (clearnotefellowship.org/warhorn) you'll find a nice array of desserts, starting with a song about food that you can actually listen to.

Nathan Alberson is Associate Supreme Vice Chancellor of writing for Clearnote Press. In his early twenties, he got a ring in the top of his right ear, and many years later, he is not lying if he tells you he has never figured out how to remove it.

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A WALL OF MIRRORS

Jenna Killingsworth

Growing up, I used to get called names like “beanpole” and “knobby knees.”

My parents never worried though, because I loved food and ate lots of it. They would laugh when we had company over and I ate bowl after bowl of plain spaghetti—smothered with butter and salt.

“She can eat as much as she wants,” they would say. “She never gets any bigger!”

And I never did. This was true of me through high school, and I grew up eating without restraint and even being encouraged to do so because of my naturally skinny frame.

In school when my mom packed my lunch, she would sometimes send me with two brown paper sacks overflowing with food. I appreciated that Mom put such loving care into my lunch every day. And I just loved eating. I enjoyed food. By that time, I was a ballerina, and before then I had been a competitive swimmer, but the thought of dieting or even being concerned with weight was foreign to me.

I went away to college, and I brought my lack of restraint to our all-you-can-eat cafeteria. I found that I could not stop eating even when everyone around me was finished and I was no longer hungry. At the end of any meal, I would go back for two, three, four bowls of ice cream.

But relationships have a way of getting complicated when you leave home for the first time, and my relationship with food was no different. I was

in college to get a dance degree, so there I was spending hours and hours in front of a wall of mirrors.

Now it goes without saying that a wall of mirrors does not rank among the best tools for helping a young Christian lady grow in faith and humility. And if the young lady is a compulsive overeater, you have a recipe for spiritual disaster. Four bowls of ice cream a day plus a wall of mirrors equals a serious problem.

It’s not that I ever got overweight, exactly, by non-dance-major standards. I was still the same beanpole that God made me, plus a few extra pounds. If you were never a neurotic dance major, I doubt you would have felt very sorry for me. But the me of back then certainly felt sorry for herself.

So what did I do? I had big spiritual insights and I made big spiritual resolutions. I realized I had never developed the skills of self-control or self-denial when it came to food. I could see that others around me had the ability to stop eating when they were full, and they certainly had the ability to deny themselves food in the interest of losing weight. Of course, I didn’t really understand the true nature of their struggles, but that’s another story. For my part, I prayed for help and made resolution after resolution to exercise self-control.

Yet, somehow, I experienced hardly any victory over my sin. The funny thing was, the more I tried to lead a godly and self-controlled life, the more I kept thinking about food, until I was thinking about it all the time. Only

now, I couldn't think about it in anything but extremes. Either I had to deny myself every pleasurable bite of ice cream, or I had to eat four bowls of it. Meanwhile, I obsessed about food and judged others for what they ate. This is relatively normal among dancers, so although I knew it was awful, not only did I not have the support or the strength to get help, I don't know that I would have accepted it if I had.

Because really I did not want help. Even though I hated my sin, I loved it at the same time, and being a dancer was my justification for continuing in it. After all, I loved dancing and I was dancing for the Lord—and God would not ask me to give up something I loved and was doing for His glory. I tried to overcome my sin, but in a sense I accepted that it was part of the package of my “calling.” In the end, I was unwilling to put my sin to death.

After graduation, I was part of a performance tour where I met my future husband. We fell in love and then he moved to Indiana to study music and I moved to Tennessee to dance. We soon were engaged and planning our wedding, and I prepared to move to Indiana. All this time, I was still a slave to food, one way or another, but at this point I was very good at hiding my sin. Then I moved to Indiana and married the love of my life, and at the same time I gave up my other love, which was dancing.

And that's when the Lord began to work in my heart. Not that He hadn't been working before, planting seeds, watering and tending them in ways I didn't perceive. But now, He allowed for the little sprouts of the fruit of the Spirit to push through the tough soil of my heart, where I could begin to see them grow. I think God wanted to wait for this, until I had submitted to Him through marriage and given up something I held dear. He's like that, sometimes.

And, of course, God works through the people and events in our lives, and the big person and event in my life were my husband and marriage. In some ways, leaving dancing behind and getting married was like leaving one wall of mirrors for another. Except, of course, marriage is much healthier. God used it to force me and my sin out of hiding for the first time in my life. I was no longer able to hide my sins, not with my husband there for meals or skipped meals or late-night ice cream binges. And, as it turns out, that was a huge relief, because his love and care and concern helped me have faith to confess my past sins and ask for help overcoming the sin that had enslaved me for so many years. And the Lord worked. Slowly, I began to experience freedom and to learn that the freedom Christ offers is so much sweeter than the fleeting pleasures of sin.

But sin manifests itself in many ways and is often so subtle that it takes years to come to the surface. As we continued in our married life, had children, moved to several different homes in town, and transitioned through phases of life rather quickly, I began to have mysterious health issues that mostly took the form of stomach troubles.

Naturally, I wanted to find a way to feel better, to have energy to care for my family, and to end my suffering from the pain and exhaustion I was experiencing. I started researching different diets and natural ways of treating my problems. It did not take long for me to see that there are an infinite number of ways to “treat” digestive issues, and each one sounded equally convincing. What began as a simple and healthy desire to make changes to our diet so that I would feel better grew into a preoccupation with food, food allergies, and a belief that revamping our eating habits could be the secret to a happier, fuller, more meaningful life.

I found that certain changes to my diet did help ease my problems, but only temporarily. I would make a change, enjoy better health for a few weeks, and then find myself right back where I started. I won't lie to you. This cycle continues to this day.

But God has been merciful in helping me to better know Him and myself. At one point, after another weary conversation about food as the culprit and solution to all of life's problems, my husband asked me this question: “Does the Bible ever prescribe food as a remedy?”

It was a good question. I suppose Paul advised Timothy to take a little wine for his stomach. But that wasn't, of course, what my love was getting at.

The sad fact is that my life has been characterized by avoiding spiritual labor in favor of something tangible that I can do with my own hands. It's so very hard to trust Christ completely for my salvation. I want to work it out for myself. And as silly as it is—of all the ways, big or small, that I could try to seize control of my life from God—I've chosen food to do it. It could have been sex or power or politics or work or family or even religion. But food is the instrument of my rebellion. It is my idol of choice. I want to make food that will save me from suffering, from getting older, from sickness and death. I want to swing from one extreme to the other because it is easier to give in to my impulses than to temper them and walk down the middle of the road. I battle with anxiety and fear, and I look to food for help. As if food is the Savior of my soul.

But, by God's grace, I know that if I do not address the problems of my heart, if I continue to suppress and ignore them, I will experience suffering

no matter what food I choose to eat. In avoiding the spiritual cure, I only increase my sorrow. I desperately need the Lord's help and power to walk by faith.

As a young lady, I did not want to do the spiritual work of repentance, confession of sin, and dying to self so that I could be free from sin. As a grown woman, I do not want to do the work of asking the Lord to reveal my sin, searching my heart, diligently seeking Him in prayer, and regularly being in the Scriptures to strengthen me in my weakness. God is very gracious and has shown His mercy to be abundant in my life. As I see myself in the mirror of His Word, and reflected in my husband and children, I pray He continues to bring my sin to light, and I pray for the humility to work for the food which endures to eternal life, and not for the food which perishes.

Jenna Killingsworth is wife to Jody, and mother to Paloma, Olivet, Samson, and Lazarus. She has the one quality required of every female who writes for *The Warhorn*: a nose piercing. Because it makes her awesome.



DRIVE-THRU AT 1:15

Dani McNeilly

So there we were, the kids and I, pulling out of Walmart at 1:15 in the afternoon, already a quarter hour past normal naptime and none of us had eaten lunch. That's when the battle started—between me and myself.

ME. Let's go to Wendy's.

MYSELF. Wendy's? No.

ME. Wendy's, yes.

MYSELF. Expensive. Junky. Bad.

ME. Easy. Convenient. Quick.

MYSELF. Just go home, make pb&j and cut some apples. It'll take five minutes, you speedy lunchmaker you.

ME. Flattery, nice. But not true. Three minutes just to get everyone in the house. Then coats and hats and a potty break and groceries to put away. And the baby will be crying in his car seat with his hat over his eyes. I hate it when he cries.

MYSELF. Pessimist much?

ME. They'd like getting nuggets for a change.

MYSELF. And you would like eating Chinese takeout three meals a day, but we're talking reality here. Have you never even read a Christian mommy food blog?

ME. Ugh, I feel guilty already—

MYSELF. Drive-thru chicken nuggets are not even food. They're non-food sacrificed to the American idols of convenience and profit. Are you an idolater?

ME. I'll get their kids' meals with apple slices. And milk.

MYSELF. Knowing you, you'll end up trading all your fries for their apple slices.

ME. It's not all about food, you know. Jesus said, "It's not what goes into a man that defiles him—"

MYSELF. He'd clearly never been to Wendy's.

ME. Seriously? Who are you?

MYSELF. I'm you!

ME. Let's agree to disagree with ourself.

MYSELF. Not until you agree to think of what's best for our children. Did we study nutrition or not?

ME. You know I know that good nutrition is good. But it's not *everything*. It doesn't *save* us.

MYSELF. Neither does going to church, or getting baptized, or helping the poor, but we still—

ME. Cut it out. That's a straw man argument.

MYSELF. I don't think you know what a straw man argument is.

ME. Homemade pb&j is not a fruit of the Spirit.

MYSELF. A straw man is an informal logical fallacy wherein—

ME. I'm *trying* to walk a tightrope here.

MYSELF. Non sequitur!

ME. No. Feeding the kiddos. It's a tightrope walk to love food as a good gift from God, to be thoughtful about nutrition, but not make that the standard I hold myself to.

MYSELF. But standards are a good thing, you can't deny that.

ME. Well, yes, that's true . . . but if I'm perfectly frugal and healthy and clean, if I avoid Wendy's like the plague, and I do it all with bitterness and guilt, what am I?

MYSELF. A good mom?

ME. No! I'm a noisy gong, a clanging cymbal.

MYSELF. A gong to unite mothers around good food! Just think of it: after lunch is done and the kids are down for naps, you can blog about how easy and worth it this was. Let the world know that fifteen extra minutes won't kill them. Let the baby cry! Let the children whine! (Better yet, discipline the whining and you kill at least two birds with one stone.) When they're old and don't have Wendy's cancer, they'll thank you.

ME. Oh stop it! I won't be more committed to sky-high nutritional ideals than to these kids, right now. God gives us all good things. All of them!

MYSELF. Even Wendy's? How is that a good thing?

ME. Because, we're all tired, and hungry—

MYSELF. You'll never forgive yourself!

ME. Sometimes chicken nuggets and fries are just fun. They're children, after all.

MYSELF. But your nutrition professors . . .

ME. And peace definitely is a fruit of the Spirit. I'll have peace if I can sit down with my kids and honestly thank God for providing a drive-thru.

MYSELF. But the Internet gurus . . .

ME. Kindness is a fruit of the Spirit. And won't it be kind when I share my fries with them?

MYSELF. But your girlfriends . . .

ME. Love is a fruit of the Spirit. I just want to love my kids and love God.

MYSELF. But your pride . . .

That was the argument I had with myself. I won't tell you who won, but I will tell you that the baby cried, the toddlers whined, and I wrote this instead of that blog post.

Dani McNeilly teamed up with Alex McNeilly in 2010 to form The McNeilly Family. Together, they have released several children, including Jubilee, Whitaker, and Zeal. Like Jenna Killingsworth (also appearing in this issue), Dani has a pierced nose. Making them both awesome.

THE ENEMY IN THE CUPBOARD

Michal Crum

According to the all-knowing Internet, every food on my table is liable to kill my poor children ten years down the road. This one causes inflammation, that one causes high cholesterol, and the other one causes diabetes, and just when I think I've got it figured out, the dietary angel of death takes a new form and creeps his way into my pantry. If I'm not careful what I feed my children, I might be guilty of murder. The mother, in the pantry, with the percolator.

At least, that's how I feel much of the time. And I know I'm not alone. We moms read that refined carbs and sugars are the hidden cause of every disease in the book (and a few that don't have names yet), so we decide to root out this insidious enemy from our cupboards. A favorite blogger tells us grains are destroying the gut health of Americans everywhere, just when we've gotten into a routine of oatmeal for breakfast every morning. And we stand in the produce section of the grocery store, hand hovering mid-air between the organic and conventional grapes, trying to decide whether we should save money on the grocery bill this week or on the hospital bill six years down the road (because, y'know, non-organic grapes cause cancer).

There is so much conflicting information. And I'm liable to believe whichever expert's words are ringing in my ears. But really, who should I choose? The ad campaign paid for by the Corn Growers Association? My pediatrician? WebMD? The FDA? Dr. Oz?

They all claim to be backed by science, of course, but even science can't get its act together. The studies from this year are the opposite of the ones

from last year. This side of heaven, we will never know the perfect diet, much less eat it.

And yet, as mothers, we feel a crippling responsibility to keep the death angel waiting outside the door, until our children have, at the very least, outlived us. We see all around us a growing list of threats, and we take it upon ourselves to vigilantly guard every entry point. And food is one of the main ways we can do that. And thus the modern mother mantra:

Put the right things in, keep the wrong things out.

Put the right things in, keep the wrong things out.

Put the right things in, keep the wrong things out.

But if we really want to protect our children, there's one place we're sure to get straight facts. The Bible tells us, "Do not be carried away by varied and strange teachings; for it is good for the heart to be strengthened by grace, not by foods, through which those who were so occupied were not benefited."

Well that cuts right to the chase, now, doesn't it?

Apparently, it doesn't benefit us or our children to be preoccupied with varied and strange teachings on theology or food. Apparently, we are to be strengthened by grace and not by what we put in or keep out of our mouths.

Ultimately, we don't have control over our children's health. God has made us stewards of their bodies for a time, but even now we cannot control every input, much less the end result. As parents, when we are confronted with our own impotence in the face of illness or allergies or even accidents and death, we have only one choice. Sure, we go to the doctor. But, most of all, we throw ourselves on God. These circumstances force us to walk by faith because we have finally come to the end of ourselves.

But we shouldn't wait for a crisis to entrust our children to God. We should submit them to our pastors and elders and ask for help more often than we bring them to the pediatrician for their annual well-child exam. And we should protect them from sexual abuse and other spiritual hazards more intensely than any strain of Ebola.

Of course, I'm not saying we can eat whatever we want or that we can stop eating or that we shouldn't think about the health of our children or that we shouldn't care about what the pediatrician says. A charge of "Be strengthened by grace, be warmed and be fed" can't replace scrambled eggs on my children's breakfast plates. Food does, in fact, strengthen our bodies just like grace strengthens our hearts, and the one teaches us about the other. Food is a gift from God, and the way we eat affects our health.

I love to cook. In fact, I love to cook healthy, delicious food in a large,

clean kitchen. And I'd love even more to do it with an unlimited budget and with unlimited time for people who really, really appreciate it.

But at the end of the day, there's only one thing that has ever kept the angel of death at bay. And it has never been supermoms who have finally cracked the code and figured out just what to put in and what to keep out of their children's bodies.

There is really only one perfect food, and that is the Bread from Heaven, Jesus Christ Himself. He is the Lamb of God and the only sure hope we have of defying the death angel's grasp.

You don't know what will or won't happen to your children. But you do know that you have a loving heavenly Father. And if you are the sort of mother that can never bear to give her child this or that food because it might cause harm, remember Jesus's statement about the father, who, when his son asks him for a loaf, would never dream of giving him a stone. "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father who is in heaven give what is good to those who ask Him!"

Michal Crum appears in this issue, or rather, her words do, as in every issue, because she's married to Ben Crum. Together they're responsible for Daniel, Zion, Knox, and all resulting chaos. Like Jenna Killingsworth and Dani McNeilly (both also appearing in this issue), Michal has a pierced nose, thus making this issue of *The Warhorn* completely awesome.



OF HARVESTERS AND HEROES

Jake Mentzel



For whatever reason, as a child, the world of talking animals was foreign to me. I never read *Winnie-the-Pooh* or *Alice in Wonderland* or *Watership Down* or *The Wind in the Willows* or *The Jungle Book*. Sure, my life was full of Disney movies and Saturday-morning cartoons, which are nothing if not talking-animal-story sorts of things. But as far as books go, the closest I ever got was stumbling onto *The Chronicles of Narnia* as a third grader.

Yet many of the great children's books are of the talking animal variety. And, for whatever reason, kids really go for talking animals. So now that I'm a father, and one of my jobs is to tell stories to my children, I have some catching up to do.

Thus, at the urging of a friend, I finally started listening to a Librivox recording of Kenneth Grahame's *The Wind in the Willows*. You might summarize it as the story of Mole and Rat, interspersed here and there with the misbegotten adventures of their friend Toad. But, as with most books, especially those of the talking animal sort, it's really about friendship and camaraderie.

Anyhow, there's a scene in the book where naive Mole wanders into the Wild Wood searching for the enigmatic Badger. A stranger to the deep, dark woods, Mole is soon lost and surrounded by strange noises. And then the snow comes. Poor Mole is cold and wet and terribly frightened, hiding in the hollow of a tree, when his dear friend Rat arrives on the scene, cudgel in one hand and pistol in the other. Together they brave the snow for hours until they (quite literally) stumble onto Badger's house.

When they arrive, colder and wetter than ever, they're greeted by Badger,

who is dressed for bed and halfway there. But Badger welcomes them in cheerily, sets them by the fire, gets them changes of clothes, tends to their wounds, and sets about preparing a feast. To my ears, the hospitality and generosity is staggering, but in Grahame's world you get the impression that this is just what people (or animals) do. And then this description of the fire-lit kitchen:

In the middle of the room stood a long table of plain boards placed on trestles, with benches down each side. At one end of it, where an arm-chair stood pushed back, were spread the remains of the Badger's plain but ample supper. Rows of spotless plates winked from the shelves of the dresser at the far end of the room, and from the rafters overhead hung hams, bundles of dried herbs, nets of onions, and baskets of eggs. It seemed a place where heroes could fitly feast after victory, where weary harvesters could line up in scores along the table and keep their Harvest Home with mirth and song, or where two or three friends of simple tastes could sit about as they pleased and eat and smoke and talk in comfort and contentment.

It was that last sentence that really struck me, the one about warriors or harvesters lining up to feast. Perhaps it was the timing of when I heard it. It was near Thanksgiving and we had just planted my grandfather in the ground. He was a farmer, and, although I was never the hardworking farmboy type, I spent some time as a boy helping out on the farm. In the crucible of thinking

about him and anticipating Thanksgiving at his house, the thought of meals for weary harvesters brought back a flood of memories—long August and September days chasing tractors through fields baling hay and then stacking it all in hot, steamy barn lofts until the deep purples of the twilight sky were the only reminder of the fiery sunset that had long melted into rows of corn. And then, as soon as we could pack our weary bones into dusty truck beds or on the backs of four-wheelers, the immense meals at the hundred-year-old family farmhouse, with Nana running around apologizing for not having made enough food (mostly from scratch) to last until Christmas, just into next week. The satisfaction of honest, hard labor and aching muscles. Ice-cold sweet tea.

When I look back on those times, the most poignant scenes for me are when we sat down to eat. To this day, when I picture a satisfying feast, I can only picture the farmhouse after a long day in the fields, Nana's table spread with mashed potatoes and fresh sweet corn and green beans and fried chicken, two or three different kinds of biscuits or rolls, maybe a couple chicken pot pies for good measure, three or four pitchers of sweet tea, and any number of other wholesome comfort foods, with homemade ice cream and some sort of pie or other waiting until we were too full to even bother trying to squeeze it into the cracks.

But, then, it wasn't ever really the food itself, was it? Yes, the food was the reward for today's labors and the fuel for tomorrow's. But it was also the fertilizer in which relationships grew. As we ate, we unwound and decompressed and recalibrated. We told the stories of the day, or at least the talkative ones did, and my brothers and I had competitions to see who could pack in the most mashed potatoes. The meal did as much to bind us together as the long, hard day of sweating beside one another.

Don't get me wrong, here. Those scenes weren't normal for me, and when they unfolded they didn't mean near so much as they do now. I'm as much a child of the suburbs as anybody, and a broken home has a way of spoiling the joy of the dinner table, no matter how hard your parents work at it. Maybe that's the reason these scenes, few as they may have been, stand out to me so much.

So until I did some talking-animal-story-inspired daydreaming and reminiscing (and it's hard to tell the two apart), it never occurred to me why food mattered so much in those stories. It was a mystery why certain authors labored painting such vivid scenes, in the same way that, for so long, it was a mystery why Nana bothered spending so much time creating them in real life.



It's ironic, of course, that it took some talking animals to make me think about the nature of feasting. I mean, it's not like feasting is something animals are known for. Gorging, sure. Hoarding, occasionally. But not feasting.

Squirrels and ants spend their days scurrying about for food, but they never spread a tablecloth. No beaver or muskrat lights a candle or says grace. No dog or rabbit takes care to politely chew with his mouth closed or tips back dangerously in his chair to spin a good yarn.

No, feasting is something that's strictly human. It belongs exclusively to those who bear the image of God. For every other creature under heaven, food is an end. But for Man, it is a means. And a means of grace at that, if only common grace.

Food has always been a means to something bigger than just filling our stomachs. It's a means to many wonderful things, big and small, because God made it that way. Just think about it:

When God placed Adam and Eve in the Garden, He tied the whole future of the human race to bits of fruit. Eating from the Tree of Life meant worship and obedience and life and eternal fellowship with God and one another. Eating from the other tree meant sin and death and hell and conflict. God could've given Adam an abstract concept or a physical boundary to test his obedience, but He gave him food.

Have you ever wondered why God calls His Word the Bread of Life? Or why the psalmist says it's sweeter than honey and better than wine? Or why God made His prophets eat scrolls (and sometimes far less appetizing things)?

Or why He placed sacrificial meals and feasts at the heart of Old Covenant worship, punctuating the calendar year with weeks of food—the Feast of Passover, the Feast of Booths, the Feast of Firstfruits, the Feast of Trumpets, and the Feast of Weeks? And why was the diet of the people of God so well regulated, with some foods labeled as clean and others unclean? And why was it that, when the Son of God was born, He was laid in a feeding trough? Coincidence, perhaps? And is it just coincidence that a meal is at the heart of how we celebrate the New Covenant?

God didn't do all that to teach us food is just for fuel or fun. Ultimately, all the sacrificial feasts and the Old Covenant imagery, and all our family meals, even our best harvest feasts, are shadows and types.

Jesus is the true Bread of Heaven and the Lamb of God, offered for and to the world. His body is bread, broken for us. His blood is wine, poured out for us.

He is the food we were made to long for, first held forth to Adam and Eve in the Tree of Life, and now to us in His Word and in the bread and wine. Through Him we have fellowship with God and one another. He nourishes us, binds us together, fills us with joy and gratitude, and gives us a sense of place. In Jesus, feasting finds its perfect expression.

Now, it's been a long and winding road from home to Badger's house to the nostalgic haze of childhood to here. And, like the Apostle Peter, we could stop and pitch our tents and call it the end of the journey. But if you've actually read the stories, you know that no journey is ever complete until you get back to home, sweet home, and that's where I'd like to end up myself.

In other words, it's one thing to open up the mystery of why God made food the way He made it. It's wonderful and insightful and fun. It's helpful to see Jesus in our harvest feasts and in our storybooks and to begin to understand the significance of the Lord's Supper. It's even nice to see how some authors of some stories, Christian or not, have managed to capture a small smidgen of the poetry in how God made the world.

But that'd be a silly place to stop. God never means for us to stay on the mountain of biblical theology. He shows us the big picture so that we can work down from there into the nooks and crannies of our lives.

So how do we work this deep down? How do we make the best of this weird and wonderful gift He has clearly built into the fabric of the universe? How do we glorify Him with food and feasting?

Well, there are a lot of ways we could go, but the most obvious answers are often the best ones. And the most obvious answer for me, and for any

other father, is that I feast with my family when we gather around the dinner table.

This is because, for a family, food is a means to glorify God with grateful hearts as we pray before the meal and then enjoy it together. It's a means to fellowship and joy and laughter as we tell stories and jokes around the table, catch up on the day's events, and get to know and understand each other better.

It's also a means of reconciliation and peace, because, let's face it, sharing a meal is too intimate a thing to do while angry. Besides, staying angry while slurping noodles is difficult enough in the first place, and it's even more difficult to take seriously. Meals have a natural way of forcing conflict out into the open and causing it to be dealt with.

In other words, *sharing* a meal with one another, really sharing it, requires a lot of relational work. It requires conflict and discipline and reconciliation. As a father, it's my job to lead in all of that.

It's my job, in fact, to make sure that the family table, as often as God allows us to share it, is the highlight of the evening. Which means I can't let the joy and peace of my table be hijacked by whining and complaining children or petty fights or quarrels or my own selfishness. My job is to bring order to my home, to focus our mealtime on Christ.

My job is to take this table work head on, and to see it as a God-given opportunity for leading my family to Jesus. It's an opportunity to deal with the conflicts of the day, to reconcile quarreling brothers and sisters, to encourage and to warn my children. It's an opportunity to listen to my children and to learn what makes them tick and to draw each of them into the shared life of our family. It's an opportunity to teach and instruct and catechize and correct. It's an opportunity to tell my wife and kids about my day, to give myself to them and allow them to share in my work, in my joys and struggles. It's also an opportunity to apologize to my wife, and ask forgiveness of my children, and to lead us all to hate our sin and love our Savior. In other words, it's an opportunity to give grace to our families.

When we do our jobs as fathers, the dinner table is filled with laughter and joy and peace and unity. And when we don't, everyone tends to avoid the table altogether, because who likes to eat in the midst of tension? Who can bear that for more than two meals a year?

Without this sort of order, pretty soon everyone ends up eating on his own time. We find a million reasons to not eat together—it's inconvenient, we're too busy, we're too tired. We'll even fill up our evenings with things we

hate in order to avoid sharing a meal with one another.

And when we do this, we lose so many things. Mindfulness of others and the art of conversation and the ability to deal with conflict and a healthy relationship with food, for starters. But, above all else, what we lose is intimacy. Healthy relationships. Our sense of place.

The more that I've come to think about food this way, the more I've understood why *The Wind in the Willows* had to have descriptions like the one of what Mole and Rat saw in Badger's house. In a story about relationships, friendship, and camaraderie, of course food had to be central. It's obvious once you realize what food is for. But not until then.

Hopefully, you're the sort of person that knew all this without having to read a talking animal book.

But whatever sort of person you are, if you remember nothing else, remember that when it comes to food, it's context that matters most, not content. Not nutrition. Restore the dignity of the family table in your home, because food is not an end. It's a means of grace. Common grace here, special grace there, but grace, through and through.

One final note. I know I've romanticized it a bit, but really, you don't need to recreate a scene from a talking animal story or restore an agrarian vision of the family farm. Leave the vests and pipes and mouthwatering descriptions of freshwater shrimp garnished with cream and rose leaves and whatever to Mole and Rat and Badger.

In other words, don't place yourself in a false yoke. I don't mean to burst your bubble, but you are probably not J. R. R. Tolkien, and you probably don't live on a bucolic old-timey farm in the English countryside, and you're not the hero of the story, Jesus is. So don't be a Christian poser. Your kids won't buy it and you'll end up doing more harm than good.

Instead, sit down and enjoy one another. Say grace, and give grace to your children. And let it be funny and goofy and even awkward from time to time. Don't get me wrong, try to make it nice once in a while. But at the end of the day, if you live by faith in the Son of God, you're the real harvesters and heroes, and no poetic flourishes will ever touch the scenes that surround your table, even when the feast consists of corndogs and ketchup. You'll put the animals to shame.

Jake Mentzel is executive director of Clearnote Fellowship, and editor of Clearnote Press. He has no piercings or tattoos of any kind. What he does have is his dignity, but so far nobody has asked him to see that.

THE FAMILY MEAL OF UNITY AND TOGETHERNESS

William Sheldon Washington-Jones Jr.

The subject of this article is something I think we can all get behind. Because what this article is about, in my opinion, is the church. And what this article is also about (the "subject" of this article, in my opinion) is a "meal" that churches throughout history have partaken of together. It's a special spiritual meal, and some churches have it once a year, and some churches have it like every Sunday. Some people think it's merely symbolic, and theologians have argued about its meaning for thousands of years. I'm talking about potlucks here.

One time I was at a church potluck, and I was sitting there eating a plate of Chicken McNuggets. Because this guy brought Chicken McNuggets in my opinion. And in my mind I was like, "Thanks, Guy."

Anyhow, at the particular time of eating the Chicken McNuggets, I was thinking about the food in the potluck line. And suddenly it occurred to me: Where are all the options for people who need more food options than just bacon-wrapped beef tips or green-bean-bacon casserole or sweet-potato-bacon pie? Where were the kefir and kale and flax seeds and chia seeds? It was like everybody in my church got together and decided to starve cool people.

Nobody had thought about people who can't eat non-processed food. But, you have to think about those people, because in my opinion, non-processed food is a lot for some people to process. And what about people who were there who didn't eat food derived from animal products of any kind? What were they supposed to eat? Just the McNuggets?

And that's when it hit me: creamed corn is dumb. Because I saw this guy (not the Nuggets guy) eating creamed corn. And I was like, Why is this guy eating creamed corn? I mean, did you ever stop to think about that? People

eat creamed corn. The only reason I would ever eat creamed corn is if I was a baby. Or if I had dentures and they fell out of my mouth and got ran over by a bus. Or if somebody aimed a gun at me and said, "Eat creamed corn." Or if somebody was like, "I'll give you fifty bucks to eat that creamed corn over there."

I guess what I'm trying to get at is Tolerance.

William Sheldon Washington-Jones Jr. is a regular contributor to this magazine. There's no particular reason that you, the reader, should know this, except that we, the editors, ran out of ink for our rejection stamp. Willie also sent us a song about health and nutrition. We wanted to bury it where we knew nobody ever looked, so it's at clearnotefellowship.org/warhorn.

Who We Are

Clearnote Fellowship is a small, like-minded body of reformed and evangelical churches dedicated to building God's Kingdom. We plant churches, train pastors, and provide local churches with biblically sound and culturally astute resources like those featured in this issue of *The Warhorn*.

Your tax-deductible gift goes to support Clearnote Pastors College, Clearnote Missions & Church Planting, Clearnote Campus Ministries, Clearnote Songbook, and more.

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