

Table Talk  
Week 1  
Food as Fuel

By Pastor Mandy Barkhaus

I don't know what it's like to be really hungry or really thirsty, but I believe it or not, can quickly go down the over exaggeration trail and think that I might die of hunger or thirst here is an example. On our recent trip to Utah, our last national park stop was to Arches National Park, and we scoped out which arches we wanted to see, and we decided that the first arch we'd hike to is the delicate Arch.

I, we had the, the map, the park map that was given to us on our way in. And I read that it was a 3.2 mile hike, and the map suggested to take two quarts of water per person on the hike. We listened. We were ready for this hike. Here's a picture of it. It was a pretty good, steep little hike up there, but we brought plenty of water, even a snack, because, you know, it's three miles, right?

You need a snack. We got there. It was beautiful. It was great. So then our next arch that we wanted to see was the landscape arch. And this is the biggest arch in the park. And the map said that it was 1.5 miles there and back. Easy, right? So I read the trail map again, and I, I saw that there was this trail called the Devil's Garden, and I read it was a 7.9 mile hike, and I read out loud to Tom the from the map, and it said to the Devil's Garden Trail, take at least three quarts of water per person.

This challenging hike involves narrow legends, steep exposures, uneven surfaces, surfaces, rock scrambling, and few trail markers. Now, normally this would be something Tom and I would be like, yes, we're of course we're doing this. But this was the last day of our trip. We were tired. We had done tons of hiking in the days before, and so we decided we're just going to take the 1.5 mile hike there and back before we got out of the car.

Are you sure? Yes I'm sure. Are you sure? Yes I'm sure. Okay. We decided. I grabbed my water bottle. It was maybe a third of the way full, and we decided Tom didn't need his because we're only going 1.5 miles. So we get a quarter mile into the trail and there is another path with a sign that says 0.5 miles and you can see two additional arches.

You know, what's a half a more mile, right. We'll add that to the toll. No big deal. So we saw the two extra arches. We made it to the landscape arch and we got there. It was beautiful. Big. Awesome, amazing. We turned to our right and there is this steep trail, people going up and down this really steep trail.

And we look at each other and we're like, ooh, that looks like a lot of fun, right? And so we talked ourselves into it. We're like, we're just going to go up to the top of this big steep hill, and then we're going to look around and we're going to come back down okay. So we agreed. So we got to the top.

And then we kept going. And then before you know it, we had committed to doing the whole Devil's Garden loop. Now we had maybe a half a court of water between us. So every mile we would reward ourselves with a little tiny sip trying to, to preserve this water that we had. But in our heads we kept and out loud we kept saying to each other, we were supposed to bring three quarts of water per person.

Anyway, so the last stretch we didn't know was the last stretch, but we had two little tiny, small ice cubes left in the water bottle, and we each had one and the last drops of water. And we were we were out of course we made it fine. We made it back to the car. It wasn't 100 degrees out like the map was probably, assuming for that amount of water.

Plus, when we got back to the car, we had a big jug full of ice water that we filled up our water bottles with. And so, we, we were fine, right? We didn't die on the trail of thirst, but it made for a great conversation for us of how we are so thankful that we have access to clean drinking water where some parts of the world do not.

It made us appreciate, the access to an a to, you know, and thankful to God for the abundance of food and, and snacks that were in our car. And we just appreciated the table that God set before us. So from the very beginning of humanity, God provided for us our most basic needs, essential needs water to quench your thirst and food to sustain our bodies.

Before humans constructed a single city, or an altar or a temple. Before there were laws and rituals, before there were kingdoms, there was a garden. And in Genesis we see that God's very first act for humans was not a command. It was not a challenge, but a gift. It was there was a place to live and a table set with abundance.

So the story of humanity goes that God planted this garden in Eden and placed Adam and Eve there to care for it. And God did not. God did not, place humans in a barren desert or an empty wasteland, but in a space that overflowed with life. There were rivers that ran through this garden, trees that produced fruit.

And every plant that was pleasing to the eye and good for food was within reach. So it was beautiful. This garden was beautiful. This garden was nourishing, and this garden was enough. This simple yet profound detail reminds us that God, that God's intention from the very start was provision, not scarcity. It was relationship, not isolation. So Genesis chapter one, verses 29 through 31 says this.

Then God said, I now give you all of the plants on the earth that yield seeds, and all of the trees whose fruit produces its seeds within it. These will be your food to all wildlife, to all the birds in the sky, and to everything crawling on the ground, to everything that breathes. I give all the green grasses for food.

And that's what happened. God saw everything he had made. It was supremely good. There was evening and there was morning. The sixth day. On the sixth day, God created us and God created this garden. And this very first gift that God gave to us becomes the thing that we take for granted. Often the first gift to us from God was God's way of saying, I care about you, right?

I care about your body. I care about your well-being. That was true then, and that's still true today. Every apple, every grain of rice, every drop of water is a reminder to us that God provides. Now, of course, because we are humans and we tend to stray from God's intended plan. Intended plan. We've made it more complicated to remember this simple fact that we should be grateful, and we've made it more complicated with convenience.

We've made it more complicated with processed foods and fast foods that are abundant to us now. And it's more complicated because of the whole Eat This, Not That guidelines and recommendations. They change seemingly every single day. Eggs are bad eggs or good eggs or bad eggs are good, right? I mean, what is it? And it's confusing. And so what do we do?

We often give up and we just eat whatever we want, right? What are we supposed to eat? What's good for us? What's not? It's confusing. Now, according to the USDA, the average American is five generations removed from farming. Now, maybe that's a little bit less here in Nebraska, but for most of us, we are far from the garden.

We are far from tending the soil. Now, most of us, we don't plant and harvest the food that we eat. We might have a small garden, but all of the food that we eat, we don't tend garden. We don't raise animals for food we don't often even know or think about where our food comes from, besides from the grocery store wrapped in plastic.

So this disconnection from us in our gardens reduces our sense of gratitude. It makes it harder for us to recognize food and water as the sacred, sustaining gifts that they truly are for us. In the Garden of Eden, before sin entered the world, humanity lived in harmony with creation. No animals were eaten. Food came from the earth, freely given.

But after the fall, that relationship changed. And God in Genesis chapter nine, then God gives permission to eat animals. But it's not without stipulations, right? The blood of the animal was a symbol of life and it had to be treated with reverence. A later God gave rules about clean animals versus unclean animals, and that became part of the conversation.

These are not just random rules that God created and gave to us, but they're part of God's ongoing invitation to live differently than the rest of the world, to live with purpose. So even in our eating, God calls us to remember that that we are living and we have holy ground under our feet. And God is calling us in our eating to be reminded that every life, every animal is sacred.

And it's not just the food itself, but the very way we approach the food with gratitude, with care, with intention to live with God's glory in mind first and foremost. Now the whole eat this, not that debate. This is not a 21st century problem, right? If Paul in Jesus both had something to say about this big question, that was that, that the early believers had.

And the big question is, what can a follower of Jesus actually eat for? For early Christians, especially those coming from different backgrounds, there were Jews, there were Gentiles there. This was a major issue. This was a major conflict in the church. Did Gentiles have to give up their way of eating to follow Jesus, or do they have to follow the Jewish Dietary Guidelines in order to be a follower of Jesus?

So Jesus taught that it's not what goes in our mouth, but what comes out of our heart is what defiles us. And Paul echoed this with, especially in his, in his letters, where he was reminding people not to let food be a dividing line. So in first Corinthians chapter ten, verse 31, Paul says it perfectly and powerfully.

Paul says, whatever you do, whether you eat or drink, do it all for the glory of God. So what does that mean for us today? How are we to give God glory at our tables when we are taking a bite or taking a sip? Well, meals are not just for the body. Meals are opportunities for us to connect with God.

That means in our everyday moments, eating and drinking these moments for us can be sacred. When we sit down to eat. It's not about just about satisfying hunger. It's a moment to be grateful, to acknowledge God's provision and remember that we belong to something bigger. Now, if you are like me, you have breakfast. Then you have a second breakfast because you get up really early and then you have lunch, and then you have an afternoon snack, and then you have dinner, and then occasionally you have a late night snack.

Right? That's a lot of opportunities for us to be grateful to God for what God provides. But there's something more that food does for us. And it's not just a reminder for us to, to be, to, to give thanksgiving to God. But food and water are gifts from God, and they are meant to sustain us and fuel our bodies so that we can fulfill the purposes God has set before us.

So think about it this way when we feed our bodies well with fruits and vegetables and grains and seeds, those things that are found in the garden, we're equipping ourselves to

love and serve well. We'll be able to spend that, quality time. We'll have energy to be present with our families. We'll be able to connect with and care for our neighbors.

We'll be able to pursue our purpose that God has placed before us. So eating for God's glory doesn't mean that we have to feel guilty about enjoying food. It doesn't mean that it means that we see food both as a gift and as a tool, because taking care of our bodies is not a selfish thing to do, but instead it's actually a stewardship thing to do.

God is calling us to care for creation that includes our own bodies. So whether you're grabbing a quick snack or you're enjoying a huge meal, there's an invitation right there at every single bite to live with intention and gratitude. And that's what it looks like to eat and drink for the glory of God. Now here's the best part God's grace covers our food choices.

Just as God's grace covers every other part of our life, we're going to eat chips and cookies occasionally right? But it. But it's worth asking am I honoring God with what I'm eating? Because mindfulness and balance, not perfection, is what we're going for. Food can easily become an idol, something we turn to for comfort or distraction instead of turning to God.

The. The American Psychological Association reports that 38% of adults say they have overeating or eating unhealthy foods in the past month because of stress. Now, I'll be honest, I've over eaten or and grabbed unhealthy foods just in the past week because of stress, and I think this statistic is probably low. We turn to food too often. We use food as a distraction, as an idol.

But what happens when the stress is more than just the day to day, daily stress that we live with? What happens when it's the fear of not knowing when your next meal comes from? Now, like I said, I've never experienced true hunger, but many people have. Maybe even some of you have. But I love that horizons cares deeply about food insecurity because right here in our city, we have adults and we have children who don't know when or where their next meal will happen.

And so this month we are we are doing things like a food drive, right? We do this often. And this month we're, we're collecting food for connection point and little free. Food pantries around the city because and because many people have different food traditions than what might look like from ours. We're collecting things like, corn meal and a tomato paste to help meet a variety of needs for people.

So here's a simple invitation for you this week. Pick up something at the grocery store, if you can, to share food with others. Now, here's a second challenge for you this week. Try to eat more foods that come straight from the garden fruits and vegetables and beans and grains, and less of the processed food that we know isn't good for us.

And we know that's not what God originally intended us, intended us for us, for us. So here is the most important challenge for you this week. Try a gratitude meal. When we eat a fresh tomato or when we bite into a juicy pear, we're not just enjoying the flavor, we're connecting to something that was planted and grown and harvested.

And every ingredient has a story, and behind every story is the creator. So choose a meal this week where you eat slowly and mindfully, and with Thanksgiving, as you take a bite, pause and thank God for the ingredients, the rice, the spices, the energy that it gives your body. Because what if what if we used every single meal as an opportunity to recognize God?

The sunshine that God gives, that grew the wheat, the farmer that harvested the corn, the hands that cooked the meal. We can turn our tables into a temple. Because whether you're eating an apple in your kitchen or you're or you're rationing the last ice cube on a desert hike, we can remember that God still provides, that God still nourishes us, that God still cares about our body, about our strength, about our health, about our well-being.

Every time we sit down to eat, we're reminded of God's care food that fuels our body, but also that fuels are calling to do the work of God. So let's be people who eat with purpose. Wouldn't that be incredible to be the people who eat with purpose? With you? We feed our bodies so that we can serve others with strength.

And whatever we do, whether we eat or drink, let us do it all for the glory of God and taste and see that the Lord is good. And we're going to do that one bite at a time. Amen. Let's pray. God, thank you for the gift of food for every seed, for every farmer, the sunshine, the rain. Thank you for every meal that sustains us and help us to eat with gratitude, to nourish our bodies for the work you've set before us, and help us to remember that even at the table, we can glorify you. Amen.