

Columns



Food is a gift, a way of experiencing God's love and of loving others.

Roots and Wings

Emily Cramer



One of my family members can only be described as impossibly healthy. The dietary restraints she has adopted and introduced to her children lie somewhere between inspiring and inimitable. They no longer eat sugar or wheat-based bread, they drink only water, and she has significantly increased the family's intake of legumes, nut proteins and vegetables while reducing their meat consumption. Moreover, they exercise together. As a family, I sigh while popping another frozen pepperoni pizza in the oven or downing a Coke to combat mid-afternoon slump. I really *should* make some changes to our lifestyle habits, I tell myself. And then I may or may not go through a short guilt-driven phase of healthier living involving breakfast fruit shakes, quinoa salads and grilled fish. And walks after dinner for at least two consecutive nights. It's never long before busyness begets short cuts and time-savers, and somehow, my best intentions go out the window and the guilt flies back in.

And yet, the other side of my relationship with food is intimately connected to the Mennonite cookbook with which I have fallen in love. Something about the description of steaming cinnamon rolls being pulled midday from the kitchen stove, fruit pie recipes passed down from mother to daughter, stacks of jewel-coloured jam and jelly jars in the pantry, crispy hams and golden turkeys brought mouth-wateringly to the table – it makes me want to be a mama who fills my home with rich smells and halloos the family to dinner with a single word. I want my daughter to fly through the front door after school to see what kind of cookies are waiting. I want her to bring friends to our table for memorable family meals heaped with mouth-watering dishes.

Called here

In spite of a culinary split-personality, my reality lies in the mediocre middle of these two ideals. I make an effort to be healthy, especially when it comes to feeding my daughter, but I also cannot imagine life without rich, delicious foods. Some weeks, I am organized: I plan a meal and grocery list on Monday and cook faithfully

Cream puffs and kale shakes

each night, bringing my family to the table over healthy (if not awe-inspiring) meals. Other weeks, everything just seems to fall apart. We cobble dinners together from leftovers, freezer meals, and yes, fast food drive thru's. Sometimes I bake. And then proceed to eat all of it within days. And vow not to bake again. I am half-heartedly healthy and a second-rate cook, and my inability to excel at *something* when it comes to food – health or cooking or both – often feels like a failure. As with so many areas of my life, I can't seem to squeeze myself into one role and fulfill it. It hails back to high school, trying to figure out what fashion I liked, and to the first years of marriage, trying to identify my home décor style.

In between the lines of following Christ are so many undefined areas: do I honour him by caring for my body with clean food? Is it God-honouring to enjoy creation through my taste buds and to revel in the fellowship that comes with good food? And where, in this equation, lies my responsibility toward those who have less, or none? I attempt to answer these questions by defining my relationship with food (a fantastic cook, a health nut, etc.), and yet in any one particularity, I come up lacking.

God hasn't defined this thing. He has positioned me in a country of plenty, where food is a gift and a way of experiencing his love and loving others. He has positioned me in a place of excess, where too much of anything, even a good thing like food, causes problems like obesity and high blood pressure and cholesterol, and I am called to self-control. He has positioned me in an age of information, so that the only way to stay unaware of needs around the world is to *try* to stay unaware. And navigating all these variables means not defining myself by any one standard but walking right alongside Christ, every moment, as I was meant to. As in so many areas of life, I'd rather have rules, a clear mandate, a strong sense of identity. But then, I wouldn't need God. ▶

Emily Cramer lives in Barrie, Ont. with her husband and daughter and teaches in the Liberal Arts department at Georgian College. She is currently rejoicing in C.S. Lewis', *Mere Christianity*.

Technically Speaking

Derek Schuurman



As a high school student, one of my first jobs was working in a small hobby electronics store on Yonge Street in Toronto. Little drawers filled with different electronic parts filled one wall: diodes, resistors, transistors and chips that people could select and purchase. People would bring in lists of electronic parts that they required for a particular electronic project taken from a book or magazine and would proceed to browse through the array of drawers. The store also sold electronic kits which allowed people to construct things such as colour organs, a device which would flash lights in sync with a music signal. At one point, customers could also purchase computer boards and parts which allowed them to solder together their own digital computer. A repair shop in back of the store provided repairs to computers and other electronic devices.

The electronic hobbyist has had a long history, dating before the time of the personal computer. For decades, ham radio operators would build their own equipment. Some were built using kits from companies like Heathkit. To this day, many ham radio operators still attend electronic flea markets, including a large annual event in Dayton called the "Dayton Hamvention" where thousands of hams flock to purchase equipment and parts. My own interest in electronics began with building electronic projects like crystal radios, oscillators, power supplies and a digital clock. I eventually earned my ham radio license, but only after several failed attempts to pass the required Morse code receiving exam. My first shortwave ham radio transmitter was also a "home-brew" contraption. It was built around a single vacuum tube with a coil I wound myself along with various surplus parts purchased or scrounged from old devices. The antenna was a so-called dipole antenna: a string of copper wire strung up in my yard.

Maker communities

As I grew older, the culture of the electronic hobbyist seemed to fade. Computers soon became a commodity and were sold in big retail stores by people who had

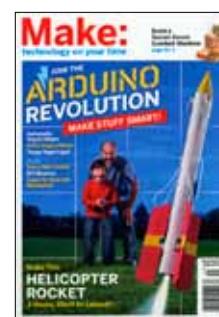
Just for the fun of it: The electronics hobbyist

never held a soldering iron. And electronic devices were no longer user-serviceable; repairing a computer was reduced to swapping out entire circuit boards, which were discarded if they no longer worked. Old radios and TVs, which used to be a treasure trove of electronic parts for projects, were now discarded without much thought. It seemed that future generations would grow up with many electronic gadgets but without the joy of building their own.

But there are signs of renewed interest in do-it-yourself electronics. There has been a re-emergence of electronics hobbyists, all of whom are curious and continue to explore and build their own devices and software. For instance, a computer board the size of a credit card called the *Raspberry Pi* has become immensely popular with hobbyists who are using it to tinker with developing novel software and to control various devices (see raspberrypi.org). A new publication called *Make Magazine* is dedicated to sharing descriptions and instructions for building dozens of do-it-yourself projects at home. Communities of "makers" are beginning to band together in cities to establish shared workspaces with a variety of equipment where they can collaborate and build neat stuff (for example, Hamilton has the ThinkHaus – see thinkhaus.org). New developments, such as relatively inexpensive 3D printers, enable hobbyists to manufacture a plethora of different novel objects they can design themselves.

I am glad to see the electronics hobbyist movement returning. I think the urge to create nifty electronic projects is something creation that we need to celebrate. I think this is summarized well in the words of the respected computer scientist, Frederick Brooks: "As the child delights in his mud pie, so the adult enjoys making things, especially things of his own design. I think this delight must be an image of God's delight in making things, a delight shown in the distinctiveness and newness of each leaf and each snowflake" (Frederick P. Brooks, *The Mythical Man-Month*). ▶

Derek Schuurman teaches at Redeemer University College and has fond memories of building electronic projects as a teenager. Recently, he has started playing with a Raspberry Pi.



New mag gives dozens of DIY project ideas.