

Back to School

After loading the shopping cart with all the supplies on the list – pencils, erasers, paper, notebooks, ruler, compass, rubber cement – and trying on new clothes for fall, the time came to make the most difficult decision of all. The choice was irrevocable, and you only had one shot at it. Which lunchbox would you take with you every day of the school year: cowboy, super-hero, novelty, or something else? Your choice would brand you with the other kids. Were you cool or just another playground hack?

Some kids tried to avoid the decision by bringing their lunches in plain brown paper sacks. That allowed them to delay the choice of a permanent pail until they could see what everyone else was carrying. It was an interesting gambit but labeled you as relatively slow unless you could decorate the bag with cool sketches as you rode the bus like a wolfman or the re-creation of the entire D-day invasion.

Others opted for a practical approach and carried plain black lunchboxes – often hand-me-downs from their dads. They did contain cool thermoses with silver cups tucked inside the lids. It was all the better if the kid could grow a mustache and filled the thermos with coffee, but that only happened when I was living in Louisiana. If I remember correctly, he also had a pack of Luckies rolled up in his t-shirt sleeve.

Then there was the unfortunate kid who had a Gumby and Pokey lunchbox. He tried decorating it with Snap-On Tool stickers, but he wasn't fooling anyone. School can be cruel.

Of course, the most important thing was what came out of the lunch box. A sandwich and fruit were typical. Cookies never made it to lunch. They were generally devoured as soon as mom was out of sight. Pizza was good, but fried chicken was better. If you had fried chicken, you always made a show of pulling it out, holding it over your head, and announcing, "Hey! I've got fried chicken." A spate of open bidding followed, which became a model for Wall Street traders in later life. "I'll trade you my fruit rollups for that drumstick!"

Some kids bought their lunch, but that tended only to complicate matters. First, there was the question of getting through the line without losing your lunch money. Then there was the issue of getting your tray to the table while negotiating the various chairs, legs, book bags, and bullies trying to trip you up. Finally, there was the issue of actually consuming USDA-issued mac and cheese. No, bringing your lunch was the best option, but that still left you with the difficult decision of choosing a lunch pail. What would it be?

I chose a black "James Bond" lunchbox because I was convinced it must have some secret gizmos that would pop out and protect me from that kid who looked like "Odd Job." I never did find the right button to make that happen, but it was the envy of the lunchroom, and I was safe for another year.

Much later, reflecting on my old, dented lunch pail, I realized an important lesson. If we make our choices based on what we think other people think, we can never really be happy. True happiness comes from who we are, not from what we have. The only opinion that really matters belongs to God, and He doesn't care which lunch pail you have. He only cares that you share what's in it!

This Sunday evening will be very special. I believe in “Intergenerational Worship.” That means I’ll present a lesson that children of all ages will enjoy. Shamgar was one of the judges of Israel, but he is only mentioned in two verses – and they are not even side-by-side (Judges 3:31 and 5:6)! His story is easy to pass over, but don’t. Join us to see why, and bring your children and grandchildren!