

SHIFT 3

from "feed me" to "let's dine together"

I don't think I exaggerate to say that the most common approach to what the American church has called "discipleship" tends toward a self-absorbed, personal fulfillment plan for self-development, and the primary motivation of the disciple is encapsulated by the phrase "feed me."

This is not biblical and it's not what Jesus intended. He said to deny self, not to develop self (Luke 9:23).

I think we meant well as "discipleship" evolved into this type of self-help. It might even seem right to us, but as the Proverbs say, "There is a way that seems right to a person, but its end is the way to death" (Prov. 16:25 CSB). Just because something *seems right* to us doesn't mean it *is right* to God.

This shift is important because Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for their self-absorbed spiritual focus (Matthew 21-23). He spoke to them from a broken heart, saying that they had missed what seemed so right to them. In truth, it was actually leading them toward death. He was so brokenhearted that He took upon Himself what was

leading them to death. Jesus nailed to the cross—the way to death caused by both the obvious sins of self-indulgence and the less obvious sins of self-righteousness.

We mean well when we talk about self-improvement, but I think we have also been deceived. I fear that we in the church have been deceived into thinking that our attention to personal spiritual development is right, but the evil one has blinded us to its self-absorption. What if in our well-meaning efforts to develop ourselves spiritually, we actually missed what develops us spiritually? Consider the notion that we develop most spiritually when we help others develop.

I *am not* suggesting that we should ignore our own needs in order to meet the needs of others. That leads to burnout. I *am* suggesting that if we focus on meeting our own needs, we will rarely meet the needs of others. This stands in contrast to the ways of Jesus: that if we focus on meeting the needs of others, we will find that our own needs for spiritual nourishment are met as well. This is true because it's in self-giving that we find our self as a church. That is, *together* in meaningful, everyday relationships as we invite along others with us like family—those who already believe and even those who have yet to believe—we will find our needs met while we meet their needs.

Those whose needs we meet normally become those who meet our needs, too. This is true as long as we are focused on investing in a few rather than on trying to be a savior for many. Someone already took that role, and it's not our responsibility.

Furthermore, I want to clarify that I *am not* suggesting we become passive with regard to our own growth. That leads to apathy and sometimes even to arrogance. I am suggesting that as we actively encourage others in *their* growth, it is the greatest catalyst for *our* growth. What many today are missing is the reality that our matur-

ing will not happen when we focus on our personal maturity; rather our maturity comes when we focus on multiplying with Jesus.

As I have heard Jim Putman teach it in various settings, the American church is full of Christians who are spiritual children but physical adults.

Why is this so? I suggest that it's because "discipleship"—as it has become—encourages us to focus on what *we* need or want, which is the earmark of being a child. Every parent knows that a mature person is one who considers the needs of others. I suggest that we will only become who Jesus intended us to become when we focus on multiplying with Him (Mark 1:17). We will spiritually mature as we spiritually multiply.

Consider these Scriptures to this point:

"If you don't go all the way with Me, through thick and thin, you don't deserve Me. If your first concern is to look after yourself, you'll never find yourself. But if you forget about yourself and look to Me, you'll find both yourself and Me" (Matt. 10:38-39, *The Message*).

"I've told you these things for a purpose: that My joy might be your joy, and your joy wholly mature. This is My command: Love one another the way I loved you. This is the very best way to love. Put your life on the line for your friends" (John 15:11-13, *The Message*).

As you can see, the focus is on others, not on yourself. It sounds counterintuitive, but our personal needs are only met when we both receive love and give love. Our needs are only fulfilled when we trust that we have been loved first by God, who was willing to

demonstrate His love through sacrifice, and as a result, gave His love away for others. This is more than a service project; it's cultivating deep relationships in which "on earth as it is in heaven" happens all around us, among those who believe, as well as those who have yet to believe—through the daily rhythms of our lives and our common life together.

We must move away from the impulse to say, "Feed me" and move toward becoming a people who say, "Let's dine together." Jesus valued meals together because he knew full well that the conversations he had with his disciples while enjoying good food made for the most life-giving, transformational moments. Jesus was even willing to endure unjust criticism in order to dine with those whom He had invited into close relationship with Him: "The Son of Man has come eating and drinking, and you say, 'Look, a glutton and a drunkard, a friend of tax collectors and sinners!'" (Luke 7:34, CSB).

Jesus knew that His disciples would grow the most as they broke bread together—both His eternal bread of life (i.e., His Word) and the literal, daily bread He provided. In fact, this dining together is a vital characteristic of the early church's life together: "Every day they devoted themselves to meeting together in the temple, and broke bread from house to house. They ate their food with joyful and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. Every day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved" (Acts 2:46-47, CSB).

So let me ask this: whom do you dine with? Are you too busy to dine with your own family, much less those in a discipling relationship? Those you disciple—whether they're believers or yet-to-be believers—may experience their most significant spiritual growth by dining with you. Don't forsake that. Also, you may be surprised at how much you grow in the process of dining with them. These moments

help us let go of our selfishness and the “feed me” mentality and help us embrace the self-giving nature of sharing a meal with others. As you grow in this, you will learn more than ever that man cannot live on bread alone.