

Self Feeding

If we are going to be disciples that multiply, we have to be self-feeding. In other words, we should learn to be a producer, and not just a consumer of spiritual things. Many people go to church to be fed, spiritually, but that is not the primary purpose of meeting together.

According to Ephesians 4:11-12, the purpose of the primary job of leaders in the church is to equip those in the church for ministry:

“And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ”

So, leaders are not there to feed us, but to equip us for ministry – to be producers, not just consumers.

There are four primary ways we focus on doing this:

- Interpreting and applying scripture
- Prayer
- Body life
- Persecution and suffering

Last week we looked at the Word and Prayer; this week we'll look at Body Life and Persecution

Body Life

Discipleship is not an individual sport, it is a team sport - more like basketball than track and field.

Question: What are some skills in basketball that can be learned with two people?

Question: What are some skills in basketball that take several people or the whole team to practice?

Body life refers to our expression of discipleship with others in the body of Christ (other Christians). Discipleship is not an individual sport. It is a team sport. Being a disciple is not just about how I relate to God, but how I relate to others, especially within the body of Christ.

Using Spiritual Gifts

Romans 12, 1 Corinthians 12, Ephesians 4, and 1 Peter 4 all talk about our corporate identity in the body of Christ in the context of spiritual gifts. Even though we have different gifts, we need one another. The hand in a body cannot function without the brain telling it what to do or the legs taking it where it needs to go. The gifts all relate to things we need to be involved in, but we need to give special attention to the areas in which we have particular gifts. When we all do that, it builds up the body of Christ.

“One Another” Passages

Something else that helps equip people for this body life are the “one another” passages in the Bible. These are the passages that talk about what we are to do for each other. There are many of these in the OT and in the NT, with more than 50 in the NT. If someone is reading their 25-30 chapters a week and is aware of these passages, they will jump out to them when they read them. They will realize they are to bear one another’s burdens, to forgive one another, to love one another, to spur one another on to love and good works, and so on.

This body life is part of how God intended us to grow individually and corporately in breadth and in depth.

Persecution and Suffering

Read: 2 Timothy 3:10-12

¹⁰ You, however, know all about my teaching, my way of life, my purpose, faith, patience, love, endurance, ¹¹ persecutions, sufferings—what kinds of things happened to me in Antioch, Iconium and Lystra, the persecutions I endured. Yet the Lord rescued me from all of them. ¹² In fact, everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted,

Question: What does this teach us about people?

Read: John 15:18-21

Question: What does this teach about God and people?

Read: Matthew 5:10-12

Question: What does this teach about God and people?

This is not something that we like to talk about a lot; but God intends good to come from persecution and suffering for his sake, and we should all expect to be persecuted.

There are all kinds of benefits listed in scripture. Peter, Paul, James, the author of Hebrews, all list Godly character traits that are gained through persecution. Peter talks about how God is glorified when we suffer well for his sake. Paul talks in 2 Corinthians about how we are equipped for ministry to others who are suffering through what we suffer. We are told there are benefits for our faith. We are taught to rely on God alone. Our faith is strengthened, purified, proven, tested. These are all benefits and God's intentions for the persecution and suffering.

The enemy also has a purpose for persecution and suffering. His purpose is to silence us. If we are silent, he has no need for persecution. If we are silent, we are achieving the enemy's purposes. But God has good purposes for us.

But how and why should we be prepared for suffering? If we are not aware that this is normal and that God works good from it, we will be more prone to be discouraged, bitter, angry, frightened, hopeless, depressed whenever we suffer for what is right. But, if we know that God intends this for their good for his glory, we are far less likely to have these reactions. In fact, we can seek to maximize these benefits that God is trying to work in our lives.

How can we be prepared and prepare others?

Baptism is a great time to highlight the fact that we are ready to suffer and ready to be rejected by people. We are ready to face financial setbacks. We are ready to suffer and if necessary to die for the Lord. Baptism would be a great time to

remind people of that and even ask them to make a pledge that they are ready to do this before we baptize them in the name of the father, son, and Holy Spirit.

We need to equip and prepare people to suffer for their faith and to do it willingly, gladly, knowing that the cost is nothing in comparison with what God has given and promised us. These momentary, light, afflictions are working for us an eternal weight of glory beyond all compare. So, we need to not look at the temporary situation, but at the eternal realities and glory and reward that await us.

Though Satan would like to silence us, we read in Revelation 12:11 of the victory in heaven from those that persevered in the face of persecution:

“And they overcame him [Satan] because of the blood of the Lamb and because of the word of their testimony, and they did not love their life even when faced with death.”