

The stories about shared meals triggered one of my own memories from my boyhood. At the time I was living in Jamaica, where dad pastored a church. I was part of the church's boys' club, and we met to do fun things together. It was late one afternoon, after we had spent several hours playing cricket, and we were famished in the way only pre-adolescent boys can be. One boy had a little money and he went to the shop across the street and brought back a chunk of spiced bun and a thick slice of cheese. Out came a pocket knife, and he carefully divided up the bun and cheese into equal morsels for each of us – I don't remember how many, probably 8 or so. It was barely a mouthful, but it tasted delicious.

But you have to understand something about what else was going on. I don't know this for certain, but the food bought by that one boy was likely his supper. Maybe his mom had given him the money. But in that culture, he would have felt it unconscionable to do other than what he did. He never would have brought food into our midst and devoured it all himself when we had none. (Perhaps it would have been acceptable for him to wait until the boys' club had dispersed, and then go and have his meal, but he chose not to.) He also did not make any distinction among us, favoring his closer friends. We all had an equal share.

Having spent my childhood there, I knew about this custom of generosity, but I had never witnessed it carried out in such a self-sacrificing way, especially as one of the recipients. It didn't register fully with me at the time, but over the years, this particular memory has grown in significance to me. I was taught a lesson that day, and it continues to challenge me.

