

## *Messy Expectations: Finding the “Right” Group?*

Part 4

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June, 2011

If you have been following along in this unexpected series on messy expectations you will know that I just outlined one possible group of problems and perceived solutions for our Messianic fellowships in America. I listed a series of 4 different factors in Part 3 and gave some of our perspective, which we have come to call a Hebraic, Torah-pursuant, maturity perspective.

I was blessed to receive affirmations in the past few weeks from many people on these thoughts, not because any of us are *happy* about the situation, but perhaps because being able to better understand and identify an issue brings us closer to some resolution. One respondent took time to write brief statements on a number of points. I include a few of them here:

- *Large organizations are minimally useful in accomplishing YHVH's purposes.*
- *I no longer desire to be a big name anything, nor do I desire to hang out with big name people. "Big name" in men's eyes doesn't often compute with "big name" in YHVH's eyes. I want what's pleasing to YHVH — even if that means being alone and rejected (as Yeshua was). Yeshua taught that that which is highly esteemed of men is an abomination to YHVH. I agree.*
- *My main concern and focus is to feed his sheep and disciple those who YHVH sends in my direction.*
- *Our ministry focus with regard to "conferences" is on keeping YHVH's feasts. Conferences often cause valuable resources and time to be diverted away from the feasts and I have a problem with this. I also question how much positive fruit they produce in the lives of the attendees. Head knowledge, yes. Spiritual fruit? The verdict is still out.*

This leader's concerns are very close to mine in regard to public visibility and acclaim of teachers and the efficacy of conference settings for discipleship. He, too, is recognizing the need for the quality standard of Yeshua's mode of discipleship most often in small groups. Yet, today, we do recognize the difficulties that arise as people try to form such groups. In my short list, points 2 and 3 fit very closely together: the instability of home fellowship groups and the prevalence of disorder and argumentativeness.

As always, there is more than one facet to these issues. From one perspective, I hear people trying out one group after another in their effort to find the right one, often drawing conclusions on the group after a very short period of time. From another, the viewpoint is that people are themselves, too unstable or independent and unwilling to cooperate or commit with any group. (Another leader just

recently responded with an even more direct comment, regarding the lamentable tendency of many to just “check their brains” at the “gate to the Messianic Movement.” He has seen that too many people seem to forget anything they already knew about what is reasonable behavior and what is not!)

Again, as always, there is more than one way to define and I would say that both of these observations can be true. There is a polarizing effect in these viewpoints, one from “inside” a group and the other from “outside.” Also, there is a polarity in viewpoints of those who find themselves in leadership roles and those who are more inclined to look for leaders to follow.

**What *are* the “messy expectations” here?** Quite reasonable sounding, really! From those who are on the outside looking in, trying to find a faith community home it is only sensible that they would want to be in a welcoming place with people who are seeking YHWH in a way that matches their own convictions and understandings. Surely, each established group would say that they just want people to join them who share their beliefs, values and ways “inside” their borders. As I have written before, the exact nature of these expectations from “outside” and “inside” are rarely explicitly defined because many people think that the right blend will just happen because they want it to happen. Maybe like opening up one fortune cookie after another, waiting for the best prediction?

I haven’t yet seen anyone who would say that they want a community that doesn’t maintain accountability and integrity with a lack of Scriptural discernment in their relationships and halachah. In fact, when people actually do find a community that maintains such appropriate boundaries and scholarship they may enter joyfully. BUT, when that accountability or need for integrity becomes an issue for them, they are the first to see it as abuse and run away quickly. How dare anyone tell ME what I can and can’t do!

Nor have I heard a community leader say that they only really want people who have the most serious personal and spiritual issues to join their group. There is often a lot of talk about the church or fellowship being a place for wounded people; “a hospital for sinners, rather than a hotel for saints.” When those walking wounded people arrive, bringing their emotional and relational baggage with them, they have often found themselves ostracized or viewed as “problem people.” Not that they don’t bring issues with them! They most surely do! But, it becomes painfully evident all too quickly that a group of people who are debilitated in one way or another are nearly unable to come together in productive ways without there being at least SOME people who are more functional or at the least after a long period of investment of care before results bloom. Those functional people may well bring adequate income, too, which is generally not the case for the troubled ones. NOW, ministry can happen and grow!

**In a nutshell, individuals looking for fellowship and fellowships looking for members want their needs to be met.** Those needs can and should dovetail in a Torah pursuant community, as I really believe that it is only possible to walk a Torah lifestyle in such a community, not isolation. Yet we see this design and expectation resulting in “**falling apart**” so much more often than “**setting apart**.” Is it surprising that this is such a volatile combination in the midst of the kind of upheaval and strain we are seeing today?

[Psa 32:6](#) *For this cause everyone who is godly shall pray to You In a time when You may be found; Surely in a flood of great waters They shall not come near him.*

This verse and these concepts have been on my mind for the past month; re-surfacing there after I had spent time considering them years ago. My understanding has been that the flood of mighty waters can be understood as the circumstances of life. As a therapist, I saw many people who claimed the name of Christian yet who had no real foundation for faith other than emotion and were now floundering in the midst of some kind of tragedy or difficulty. They were often confused as to where God was and sometimes would even determine to attend church services or bring the one they were concerned about to church as the only way they knew to draw near to Him. It was easy to see that the disciplines of prayer and Scripture study were beyond them during the crisis, yet the Truths they most needed to endure cannot be gained by someone just giving you the facts! Seek Him while He may be found in your life; deepening your knowledge of His Character and His Word and His Ways *before* crisis hits and you will be sustained! Gratefully, it is also true that the Ruach will meet us where we are... when we let Him. Too often, though, the kinds of turmoil people face leave them impatient and in pain, searching for an anesthetic to “fix it” unwilling to pursue a path of prayerful patience.

Here we are, nearer than ever to Messiah’s return, in the season of struggle, characterized by duplicity and the strife among brothers as is related to the 7<sup>th</sup> Day and the 7<sup>th</sup> oppositional behavior according to Proverbs 6:16-19. Scriptures tell us that Yeshua warned that he did not come to bring peace but division. Not as the world or the evil one divides, but a division revealing the heart motivations of those who follow Him and those who do not. A division that leads to witness whether in life or death.

We struggle to know how to come together in faith in Messiah; to find the unity that He prayed for us to have and it eludes us. In some ways, we have created the dilemma for ourselves as I have written earlier. We do not want to continue in fragmentation and disharmony! Many will join in the anguish of intercession and prayer for Messiah’s Hand to bring us to some kind of unity. Yet we are still outside of our Promised Land; still bearing the consequences of sin. The future hope of restoration is there but how do we walk until we arrive?

Last time I wrote about the four areas of problems and perceived “fixes.” I identified some ways in which I believe we have been contributing inadvertently to these very issues; particularly relating to viability, stability and endurance in Messiah centered fellowship.

Today the *familiar* question is: how do I find the right group?

Since the decision to develop community relationships over the long term is an important one-- covenantal in nature-- it makes sense that one use as much discretion and wisdom and prayer as would go into marriage preparation. Finding the right person is important, but then once having chosen that person, the focus must also include a serious commitment to “being” the right person.

While it is true that it is important to find people who are genuine and serious in their commitment to Messiah without legalism and also able to allow for joy it is also true that it is just as important to be aware of “being” the right person for a group. It is a mark of immaturity to be looking always for what is provided *for me* without considering what I can provide *for the community*.

Fellowship groups that have clearly determined boundaries and structure and authority will have a somewhat easier time recognizing when these boundaries have been challenged and responding in more proactive ways; rather than just reacting out of emotion. Spending time on the organizational aspects of being a group has seemed unnecessary to many fellowship leaders as they seem to have thought that people will just take care of themselves if we are all only interested in the same thing...NOT! If all were equally mature and able to draw directly from the Ruach perhaps this would be so, and Yeshua willing, one day it WILL be so. But not today. Not yet. Sheep without a shepherd are harried and helpless.

I have just spoken recently with someone who recognized that their Shabbat gatherings were primarily based in friendship and that none of them want to take the steps that would cause the group to grow or their purpose to become more clearly identified. It appears that they find this a rather daunting prospect. Keeping things on a social level simplifies. Can't argue that! However, I believe the more important question is whether or not this choice is pleasing and honoring to our Messiah? It may be the best choice for some groups yet not for all.

It seems parallel to the lessons we were being taught over our recent Shavuot camping gathering when the issue of right vs. wrong, and what is good, better or best came up. When we are early in our faith walk, we are having a struggle discerning and separating out our choices; right things and wrong things. As we mature and the “obvious” bad things are less prominent in our lives that choice needs to be less important as we become more focused on choosing between what is good, better or best. How often do you see or hear people dealing with this question? Aren't most content with the first step? Though our Abba is free to bless us as we choose that right path, He has so much more for those who seek Him in obedience and do want to grow closer to Him. How can this be done if our fellowship groups remain socially based, without any authority or accountability? How can this be done if a group chooses to go under the authority of leaders who do not believe as they do? (i.e under umbrella of a church group that refuses Torah, or a synagogue that refuses Messiah Yeshua) If a person hasn't yet understood this calling upward, they will be content to stay in the shallows rather than going to the deeper intimacy. They may even see it as becoming legalistic. Clearly, it is not the norm.

The term “reluctant Shepherd” came up again in the process of consideration here. Just as people are reluctant to place themselves in a perceived vulnerable position where they fear they could be hurt by leaders, so too are leaders gun-shy about being in a position that leaves them far too vulnerable to pot shots and accusations. In both cases, perhaps we could say that the focus tends to be on performance, which leads to fear bonds, rather than bonds of love. These fear bonds are painful all around though they may hold people together. I have grieved when I have realized that many people have lived through years and years of being in one fellowship group after another, each one starting in hope only

to end in flames. I can see how their ability to invest and commit deeply in a community would be hampered by fear and the anticipation that this group, too, will fall apart so it would be best not to be too vulnerable or committed to it. We can do better if we just keep one another at arm's length. Be careful not to have too many expectations of one another, or better yet, don't have any expectations! Not so troublesome or messy. If things do fall apart, we won't feel so badly about it either because we never did put all of our proverbial eggs in this one basket this time!

**When such a detached attachment is the norm, how will we ever grow?** How will we learn to work through conflicts to greater strength? How will we grow to be like Messiah, accepting the suffering right along with the joy set before us? If our study group is constantly shifting and changing, how is a foundation of Scripture knowledge built? How are study skills deepened so that we can all become good Bereans together? If we never find or accept any authority in our lives, how will we learn to function under authority? How will we learn our part in helping those in authority remain humble and teachable? How will we grow if we remain without a YHWH honoring shepherd? And a shepherd who does not run away or overly busy themselves with people outside the local flock! If we do not grow in these ways, we **do** remain dependent on the latest teaching or media event, which leads us right into my other points in the original 4.

If one has found a group and leadership with YHWH honoring ways, while one is looking with eyes wide open in the choice, may Messiah strengthen and embolden us to then stash our critical natures just long enough to be able to consider how we each might need to grow in order to **be** the right person and the right group in Him; for that time and place.

As a group that has spent time over the last eleven years on the development of structure, boundaries, maturity we are experiencing direct challenges to our choices: not "just" right or wrong, but now ...the more excellent way, the higher path. Not because we are better than other people or groups for surely we are NOT! Years of developing relationships in the context of helping one another to mature has provided a safer place in which we can encourage, exhort and challenge one another than any of us have ever experienced before. And it seems that our Abba is more able to present a challenge to us as well! Praise Him, we experienced such joy when we recognized our "quail" tests and were able to move on without being found with meat between our teeth! And the test was met individually and corporately with spontaneous willingness to study together, search the Scriptures and yield to His ways, not our own expectations. Maybe, just maybe, we will be ready to strike out for the Promised Land soon without having to go around the mountain again and again. How about you?