



Messy Expectations: Internal Resistance, Strife and Division in Sheep

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*Obey your leaders and submit to them, for they are keeping watch over your souls,
as those who will have to give an account.*

*Let them do this with joy and not with groaning,
for that would be of no advantage to you.*

Hebrews 13:17 ESV

As always it seems, we are continuing to learn more about relationships and the process of coming alongside one another, iron sharpening iron and the maturity process. The difficulties seem easier to bear when we comprehend a lesson, a learning through them that will benefit us as well as others.

In several teleconferences we had come to identify what we called “reluctant shepherds” who had been called to lead home fellowships yet didn’t feel in the least equipped to do so and experienced great difficulty and stress as they tried to cope with all the various ways people can be a part of a group. These ways would include being mature, dependable, cooperative, equally focused on our Messiah first above all else, as well as being needy, demanding, ungrateful, headstrong and downright stubborn. Does it have to be said that the first group can be as much of a delight to shepherd and serve while the last group is very much a strain and drain of emotional energy?

We have spoken with a number of people who have attempted to lead home fellowships, run into such storms that they have put an end to the group, and are either resting or resistant to ever trying such a thing again or reluctantly contemplating how they might do so. As I have written elsewhere, if we were all equally focused on serving our Messiah and the initial joys that surface when we gather in His Name it would be well and good. Unfortunately, all the sheep in Messiah’s fold are not of the fluffy white variety. More of us have a bedraggled or careworn appearance. I have even just learned of a ministry identified as Battered Sheep!

In the series entitled [Messy Expectations](#), I have examined some of the factors of group dynamics that make things messy as well as some of the internal process that leaders may experience, as I have, in dealing with disappointment. *(I have also just come across an excellent article written by Charles H. Spurgeon on a similar subject, entitled [“The Minister’s Fainting Fits”](#), which I enthusiastically join Warren Weirsbe in recommending it be read yearly by anyone in a pastoral/mentoring role.)* In the article about [strife and division and how they play out to destroy fellowship groups](#), I have examined some of the dynamics that occur between members of a group and those outside the group who approach it in one way or another.

Today we are focusing on a pattern that we have become all too familiar with as it pertains to the relationships between elders or shepherds and their members when exhortation or accountability issues arise. Even though we have seen this pattern repeat itself in various situations over many years and have spent quite a lot of time identifying the elements and processing them with our members we find that the same issue can still be a powerful influence of division. It seems that it is much easier to see theoretically, in retrospect, or in another person than it is to see as a current issue in ourselves. If you are familiar with our [Drama Triangle](#) materials that we teach, you may recognize this as a way an individual can have the entire triangle operating within themselves! Sounds a lot like our Messiah’s exhortation to take the log out of our own eye before we worry about the speck elsewhere. (Mathew 7:3-5)

Anecdotally, we will describe a recent situation we experienced, and then examine the principals found within. We will provide some detail as it becomes important to the overall understanding. This particular incident occurred between Janell and I. We are grateful that the bonds of our relationship in Messiah are strong and were adequate to successfully meet this challenge, again! It is because of the strong bond in our calling to serve Messiah and His people that we were able to rather quickly identify and dispel the issue without damage. We see that this also makes it a good teaching opportunity. This is our goal for all community relationship issues because we do think that such challenges will continue!

One evening, I, Barb, called Janell Schroeder, who is our co-leader, an elder with teaching gifts, about a community matter. She has been a part of a joint household with a member of our community who is also single and the mother of two teen aged boys. This arrangement has worked very well for more than a year to all of our joy. I learned they were watching a movie and casually asked what they were watching. We often share information about a good one since they can be so hard to find. When I heard that the movie in question was one that involved what we believe to be false teaching and would consider a kind of “spiritual poison” I was quite taken aback. When I asked Janell why she would be watching it, she responded that a woman at her workplace had given it to her. They were stopping to discuss it as they went along. I was aware of a very cold and distant tone in her response. My response was that I agreed that she can watch whatever she wants to but that it wouldn’t be my choice. We dealt with the question that led to the call very briefly and ended the conversation. I was uncomfortable about it and realized that it was not only a matter of what she was choosing to watch, since I believe her to be well enough equipped to recognize and not fall into false teaching, but also that the other family was involved as well. I resolved to speak with her about it at our weekly intercessory prayer meeting in two days’ time.

The next day, Cheryl, the other adult in the household, was doing some office work for S.A.M. and mentioned how uncomfortable she had been when she heard that I was on the telephone. She explained that her immediate unspoken response was that Barb wouldn't think very highly of this movie. She also noted that she had felt a "check" about watching it not only for herself but also being aware of the vulnerability of her sons and planned to talk with Janell about it all. She did appreciate that they stopped and talked about the more challenging parts of the movie as well as where the spiritual "teaching" implied was false in our understanding. Since watching it, she couldn't get some of the more graphic illustrations from the movie out of her mind's eye. One of her sons also experienced this. She realized that she had followed Janell's lead in this and disregarded her own discernment in the matter. I encouraged her to speak with Janell on this as I would also be doing the following evening.

Janell's perspective:

As already stated, Barb called about another matter and the subject of what movie we were watching came up.

When Barb asked me why I would be watching it, I responded something to the effect that a woman at work offered it to me last and I knew this particular topic was not what we believed but it was something to watch. The minute I was asked to tell what movie we were watching I could feel a hardness, a coldness, a defensiveness rise up in me and I carried that "wall" into the brief phone conversation with Barb and beyond.

After we had watched the movie Cheryl mentioned that this particular movie would not have been her first choice. That was all I knew of her opinion until a couple of days later.

Situations such as this have happened so many times that we have really lost count. We do not think that they are unique to us, but that in this community, our *halachah* is such that we would more directly address them than is usually the case. Sadly, it hasn't been possible to overcome every such challenge with every person but we press on and celebrate the times that we are able to successfully negotiate such a situation. We also celebrate the growth in emotional and spiritual maturity for those involved that becomes evident each time something like this is recognized and defused!

When we were able to join together during our intercessory prayer time, we did process what had happened. Despite my disappointment and concern, I was grateful that I was able to remain more at peace with less strident urgency than I have had a few years earlier under similar circumstances. For her part, Janell was able to respond peaceably to my statements and questions as we explored what had taken place. It was clear to us both that our confidence ***in Messiah in one another*** made it possible for this to happen without it becoming an adversarial situation. Cheryl, too, had followed through on her commitment to talk with Janell about her concerns. Praise Yeshua! As we prayed and spoke about what occurred some things became very evident. I was then more concerned over what happened than I was about the initial movie choice!

Janell's perspective on what happened at work and over the time between Sunday and Wednesday evenings.....

*Over the next days, I started experiencing what I've termed "swirlings" – thoughts and **emotional** undercurrents **about a situation; this time the movie** and Barb. "Doesn't she think I can explain why we consider this a false teaching?" for example. Yet the more these thoughts to defend and justify my decision and actions sprung up, the more things did NOT add up. Any time a swirling would come into my thoughts, I found myself agreeing ("Yes, what about that?!"), yet the next second I was frowning because it wasn't holding water even as I entertained the thought.*

It wasn't until the evening that Cheryl was at the S.A.M. office that the really big swirl hit me. "Why should Barb be sticking her nose into my business anyway?!" I stopped in my tracks! "Oh, that is NOT true!" I exclaimed out loud. "Barb has a shepherd's heart and she is concerned for our spiritual well-being." I stated this emphatically and firmly. The swirling left my head immediately. Imagine that!

It wasn't until I took the stand to state out loud who I know Barb to be and what I know her heart to be that things cleared in my heart and mind. It wasn't until the big swirling in attempt to divide Barb and me that I realized I was under spiritual attack. With that realization the tactics were blown into the light! I prayed and asked Yeshua to show me what He understood about the whole situation. When Cheryl came home later that evening she was more open with what she had been thinking and the disturbing visual images she'd had since watching it. That night I slept soundly and when the alarm went off the next morning, I awoke with one word in my head – "uncovered."

I understood from Yeshua that taking the movie into my hand at work, instead of telling my co-worker that I did not agree with what it presented was the first uncovering. The movie was there for almost a week as I didn't intend to watch it. Then when the boys asked to watch a movie, all of a sudden the bag was in my left hand and my right hand was holding the movie aloft and I was exclaiming, "I have this, even though we don't agree with it. Should we watch it?" The boys eagerly agreed because they just wanted to watch something new. Cheryl had a check, I learned later, but she said nothing at the time. We sat down to watch it, and even though we did stop the movie to talk about things several times and refer to Scripture to define our understanding, the covering protecting us from spiritual attack and division was flung off us. Strife and division had an opening and took full advantage and I was caught with my spiritual armor off.

As Barb and I processed through the situation, she was concerned that she hadn't done enough at the time of her phone call to protect us. I told her that if she had said anything more at that time, it wouldn't have been received. I believe she did what she was supposed to do. She did question why I would be watching that movie and stated that it wouldn't be her choice. She didn't push, but she was clear. I believe if she would have done more at that point the evil one would have pushed the division issue much quicker and harder. I do believe it had to be YHWH working in me to resolve the attack. Thankfully, He is faithful!

When asked why I took the movie in the first place, I had no good explanation. To this day I still don't really understand it. Was it a sifting? A Job thing? A test? I don't know. But I do know that we were able to stand in echad with Messiah Yeshua and work through the attempt at division and we overcame!

So here we have the overall pattern that seems to work quite effectively: instill doubt where an opening is given, and then manipulate it until it becomes full blown division. It seems to work whether it is within the mind, will and emotions of an individual as we are focusing on here, or between people as was focused on in the earlier piece on group dynamics. As I write this I can't help but observe that this is the evil one's tactic with Eve/Chavah in the garden, and it is his tactic today, working through the frailty of our flesh.

Having seized an opening where one's spiritual discernment has been compromised, we see that the issue then becomes one of personal attack and rebellion. *Who are THEY to have any say in my life! I can do what I choose! And just who are THEY are accountable to anyway?*

The emotions become embroiled and the initial incident may be magnified. The longer a person harbors these thoughts and emotions--swirlings--without bringing them into the light and challenging them, the more damage seems to be done.

It can often be, too, that a similar experience from the past in which there are unresolved feelings of resentment comes forward, without the conscious realization of the individual, and is projected onto the current situation, in effect, making the person in the present guilty of "causing" whatever the harm perceived in the past.

It is tiring and exhausting to be on the receiving end of this as much as it is difficult to be dragged through it. Here is where the reluctant shepherds come in! Having been through such an ordeal more than once, often with the same people repeatedly, I have found it difficult to respond immediately without adding fuel to the fire with my own emotions about what has been said. There is a sort of sick "oh, here we go again" feeling; especially if it has proven to be unresolvable many times in the past. Even when it has proven to be resolvable in a positive way in the past, as we experience, it still has a "kick" which is necessary to address and reject every bit as much as it is necessary to reject the initial swirlings.

We have spoken in recent weeks about a realization about something said about Messiah; that He came to bring peace and good will on earth. I had always considered this to be synonymous; peace and good will referring to good relationships and it seems that such peace and good will is more and more lacking, doesn't it? More specifically, I see now that the "peace" is the outcome and "good will" is the means. **Relationships will remain peaceful and harmonious in Messiah when good will is recalled and acted upon.** This is how Janell, and the others among us who have been in a similar position, have overcome the situation. We have reminded ourselves of our unity in Messiah, our shared heart concern that all of us be equipped and mature for the walk and work He is preparing for us. We have spoken to ourselves, as Janell did, sometimes out loud if necessary, to interrupt the process! In effect, we have acted with "good will" by remembering that we do have good will toward whomever is holding us accountable....and that person has good will toward us as well.

When this is acknowledged as the basis for resolving what is going on, the power of the divisive effort is drained out of it. The swirlings are put to rest and must go! In Janell's description, because of her ability to specifically articulate what happened, we see how the subtle innuendos were having an effect on her thoughts and emotions over days, UNTIL the accusations became more blatant and she could recognize and resist! Before that time, she was puzzled but still vulnerable and has said that she found it nearly impossible for her to pray about the situation while it was still powerful.

Janell and Cheryl had an intense time of prayer and repentance when they realized that both of them had contributed to a "hole" in their spiritual covering for the immediate household, as well as for our community. We determined that it was important enough to share the situation with our entire community for their learning and Janell then asked for blessing, anointing and reinstatement in her position as elder, which we were only too happy to provide! May this be another part of our teaching that helps us to recognize such situations even more quickly and avoid them altogether!

It is written *"Submit yourselves to Yah. Resist the devil and he will flee from you."* James 4:7 We see this sequence of events as a teaching opportunity to help us learn more specifically what it means to be in covenant relationship with one another, the importance of allowing the Ruach to transform us by the renewing of our minds, and how necessary it is to recognize and counteract the schemes of the evil one manipulating our flesh.

We see, too, the benefit of understanding what it means when our brains actually shut down on the desire to be in relationship with another while defending our own position. Dr. Karl Lehman and his wife, Charlotte Lehman, MDiv., have an excellent teaching on how this works in

their DVD entitled [The Verbal Logical Explainer](#). It acknowledges how our God has designed us and brings into the light some of the biological/chemical processes that are at work when we are NOT able to function as a relational person. It further outlines ways for us to recognize when this is happening and how to be restored through submission to our Abba.

External resistance that destabilizes and destroys community and internal resistance that destabilizes and destroys community—danger comes from both within and without.

The same pattern of creating doubt about another's heart that was used in the garden is all too effective among His people today. In this situation, it was specifically in the context of an exhortation about wise choices as is true in so many fellowship situations. May we remain humble and teachable under the Wing of our Great Shepherd, Who speaks to all of us, as well as to those He puts around and over us for our well-being.

Abba Father, please continue Your work in us to prepare us to be without spot and blemish when Messiah returns. We see how the same kinds of doubts about another and a lack of good will toward them can lead us right down the wrong path. Together we know much more than any of us knows personally. Together in You we are stronger than we are on our own. We know that the evil one must also recognize this and must do all possible to manipulate and use any such "holes" toward tearing us apart.

Please cause us to have the eyes to see and ears to hear when such a situation is in progress. Please strengthen our ability to remain teachable and to recognize challenges like this one so that we can put the to rest without further harm to anyone involved!

And please, Abba, be with all of us "reluctant shepherds" who are striving to honor You and Your call to us to feed Your sheep. We need Your strength as it is clearly not within human bounds to withstand repeated onslaughts against our hearts and spirit. Please be with Your people who are also striving to honor You and who so desperately want community relationships and leadership yet have so many fears rooted in their past experiences. All of us look to You, our Great Shepherd, Who alone is able to sustain us and allow us to reach the season of His return. May it be so, in Yeshua's Name.