

Messianic Fellowships –“Messy” Expectations & Disappointment

Part 2

Messianic fellowships often struggle due to failure to resolve both spoken and unspoken expectations of one another. This is true personally as well as in the sense of group dynamics and process.

- How DO we handle it when a conflict arises?
- Can we get through this without it blowing us apart?
- Why isn't it enough that everyone involved "loves the Lord?"

Previous experiences predispose people to various emotional responses ranging from anger, hurt, disappointment, hostility or fear. Too many "falling out" experiences that feel or end up as "falling apart" experiences lead to less hope of gracious resolution. Unrecognized personal vulnerability in shepherd leaders can be used to confuse expectations and magnify conflict. The ensuing "battle" between members is designed to erode strength and confidence in Messiah in one another. Be of good cheer! HE IS STRONG ENOUGH TO SUSTAIN US EVEN THROUGH THIS!

The one I am addressing here is that of disappointment. This has been my own vulnerable point and I want to share this in hopes of helping others see and avoid this pit! It is also true that every one will have some vulnerability that can be exploited in ways they do not see. Perhaps it will be personal insecurity, anger management, addictions, whatever. The important point to know is that whatever the vulnerability is, do not be surprised that there will be expectations surrounding it. Do not be surprised if it is somehow found to be the very thing that is happening in a leader that is being magnified or exposed through some conflict in your group.

In short, how do most shepherd leaders respond when they see people who are not contributing to the well-being of the community and in fact, even detracting from it? What is our expectation of the appropriate way to handle such situations?

Though we know our model is Messiah, Who was never surprised because He knows what is in man, we fall into the trap of having had high hopes for someone, only to see them fall. It is easy for our human expectations to get mixed up with our Godly expectations.

People may not have considered that there is a difference between disappointed for and disappointed in another. This contributes to an entirely unexpected response!

As a therapist for many years, I have learned that I am better at meeting others in their disappointment and helping them come back to joy, than I am in expressing my own disappointment and helping them come back to joy. For those who have difficulty separating

out disappointment, sadness, anger and frustration--which is really just one form of anger—it isn't too hard to see a toxic mix of emotions that may be evident on the surface or lurking just below. Disappointment for in a Godly sense can easily become mixed with personal disappointment and a sense of futility. The evil one loves to see a leader shepherd overcome in any way but especially through the manipulation of what are appropriate responses.

I experienced much of my own disappointment over several years as ***“disappointment for”*** as I saw some people who just didn't seem to be growing in spiritual disciplines, and some in fact, even falling backwards. I did not see that this kind of disappointment was not understood by all involved. It has been interpreted differently, as ***disappointment in*** people. A heavy burden indeed to believe that someone is disappointed IN you; whether or not it was real.

I don't know exactly the point that my own expectations began to mix in, but I do know that there was a magnification of it all at some point, making it all feel too much to deal with. I found it harder and harder to remember that there were so many others who WERE doing well despite the challenges being presented by a few. I fought that feeling, knowing it isn't fact, through prayer and prayerful support of those I trust. We have together realized that there was also a spiritual magnification going on that made it all worse. Praise Yeshua for exposure of things that are not from Him! In this learning process, we grow and we can then share with others who need to know the same things!

As I worked with people coming out of satanic ritual abuse and witchcraft, I saw what we have now seen in community as well. The evil one specializes in leading or forcing or manipulating someone into a behavior or emotion that is detrimental, or negative in some way. Once having done so, the table turns and there is now condemnation for the very thing that was forced.

What I did not know until recently was that my disappointment was not having the response I thought it was. I thought it was appropriate for me to express disappointment and concern, as I encourage others to do with anything that concerns them. I saw it as a personal expression that would hopefully, lead to some resolution. For many, this is indeed the way it works, thankfully. What I did not see was that there are some people for whom it weighed too much! They didn't have enough self-assurance or confidence to view it as my issue and determine if they had any appropriate response to help. Some people who are not self-confident will far too easily perceive a leader's disappointment as shame. “You are disappointed in me therefore I must be wrong or bad.” The leader is “making them ashamed;” or harming them; or even abusing them. If there is anything difficult to bear it is certainly shame!

Not only shame, but also the belief that the shepherd leader is shaming them! What a knock-out punch! Certainly this is not within anyone's expectations of what Messianic fellowship should be like! How easy it is then, to question the character of all involved and fall apart. How easy it is to find sympathetic ears who **have** genuinely been taken advantage of or harmed by authoritarian leaders. Failing that, how easy to find those people who feel entitled to a great deal of attention and whose expectations were not met. Perhaps they find the ears of those who are gentle in spirit and easily taken advantage of to get on the bandwagon. On and on it goes. Round and around the Drama Triangle, growing in intensity and "feeling" impossible to address!

Do you see the picture of destruction of community through personal vulnerability and manipulation?

Here is another picture of a type of an expectation that can injure our communities. It happened in our joyful community time of Sukkoth. How far off base a word can go: a simple word of caution to someone who quietly accepts the caution without response at the time. Later, memories and feelings of being scolded and ridiculed for not knowing better in other situations flood the mind and the assumption is that the word of caution was just one more example of others treating the person as incompetent or as a child. The thought came over and over again that this person, too, is harming me and making fun of me. The person involved recognized that something was wrong, and was able to prayerfully assert mentally over and over for a week, that these thoughts were not correct; and not related to the current situation. It came out in discussion to the amazement and relief of all involved; causing no harm in the revelation, but leading to a good laugh at how fragile even strong people can be! When hearing of this example one response was "How wonderful that they were mature enough to recognize this!" My response is that it is indeed, wonderful; but it is not by accident! The ability to recognize and cope prayerfully with such an expectation is part of what we acknowledge and work on as a community. Praise Yeshua!

Is it worth it to spend time learning how to relate well and understanding the dynamics of groups so as to address expectations; and bring unspoken ones into the light? YES and amen!

Watching and praying in Messiah,
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