

# Go & Make Disciples

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In Matthew 28:16-20 we read:

*“So the eleven talmidim (i.e. disciples) went to the hill in the Galil where Yeshua had told them to go. When they saw him, they prostrated themselves before him; but some hesitated. Yeshua came and talked with them. He said, “All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Therefore, go and make people from all nations into talmidim (i.e. disciples), immersing them into the reality of the Father, the Son and the Ruach HaKodesh, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember! I will be with you always, yes, even until the end of the age.””*

This was a commandment that Yeshua gave to his 12 disciples and, if we believe that we too are his disciples, then the commandment is for us as well. But are we really disciples of Yeshua in its full sense? To be sure of it, we must first know what being a disciple means. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines “disciple” in several ways:

(a) *“...one who accepts and assists in spreading the doctrines of another.”*

(b) *“...one of the twelve in the inner circle of Christ's followers according to the Gospel accounts.”*

(c) *“...a convinced adherent of a school or individual (e.g. a disciple of Freud).”*

The Cambridge English Dictionary defines “disciple” similarly:

(d) *“...a person who believes in the ideas of a leader, especially a religious or political one, and tries to live according to those ideas.”*

Are we who are here truly disciples of Yeshua according to these definitions? I am confident that most of us are, in that we believe who Yeshua is and what he stands for – that He is the Messiah and the son of God, and by our receiving his sacrifice for forgiveness of our sins and by seeking to obey him and to apply his truths, ideas, and principles in our lives we are saved. But one of Yeshua’s principles is disciple-multiplication. Yeshua commanded his First Century disciples to be active in making other disciples, so we who say we are his disciples, cannot fully be so if we do not buy into that as well. That is what I want to talk to you about today, and in doing so to ask this question: Are we engaged in making disciples for Yeshua?

Many of us here came from Christian churches that emphasize personal salvation over Kingdom responsibilities. Then we came here and found out that God has work for us to do that requires both time and knowledge. We may have come into Messianic Judaism already partially discipled but, once here, we discovered that there is so much more to learn.

As disciples of Yeshua charged with making disciples of others we might properly ask where we should begin. The answer is simple; we should begin with ourselves. We should take a survey of where we are both spiritually and knowledge-wise, and purpose to advance to where God wants us to be. And since almost no one sees himself as others see him, the best way for us to do that is to ask a leader or another spiritually mature person within the congregation to evaluate us and work with us.

One of the best ways I have found to do this is to compare ourselves to two books – one Messianic Jewish, and the other Christian. The Messianic Jewish book that I recommend is the one that Ohev uses for its new members class; it is Dan Juster’s book “Growing to Maturity.” Even if we have attended the new members class and read that book, we should go through it again with a personal discipler of our choosing because discussing issues in a class is not the same as working with a person one-on-one. It is entirely possible to read and discuss “Growing to Maturity” chapter by chapter and cover-to-cover, emerge as a qualified Ohev member, and still need to bring our life into alignment with some of its biblical and Jewish content. I add the word “Jewish” because if God has drawn us to a Messianic Jewish congregation, He has brought us to a very special place where, whether or not we are a Jew, we will need to be disciplined as though we were because we will eventually be called to make disciples of Jewish people who are brought across our path; it is one of the special callings of Messianic Judaism and of those in it.

The second book that I recommend is “Self-Confrontation,” developed by John Broger, and published by the Biblical Counseling Foundation. Its subtitle is “*A manual for in-depth discipleship based on the Old and New Testaments as the only authoritative rule of faith and conduct.*” It is the first book I use to train Biblical Counselors because, in a biblical context, counseling is very close to and almost synonymous with discipleship – the only difference being that in counseling, the one being counselled is asking for help with a stated problem. Permit me to read some of the subjects covered in the book from its table of contents:

- Man’s way and God’s way
- The biblical dynamics of change
- Dealing with self
- Anger and bitterness
- Learning how to love your neighbor
- The Marriage relationship
- Parent child relationships
- Depression
- Fear and worry
- Life-dominating sins
- God’s standards for life

That should be enough to wet our whistle (as they say) because, although with God’s help we can make disciples while still struggling with some of these issues ourselves, God wants us to be fully disciplined “disciplers” for our own sakes as well as for the sakes of those we are seeing to help.

So, we begin by seeing to our own needs and, once we have achieved those, we will be a place where we can help others. The first place that God wants us to make disciples is in our own homes, with our own spouses and children. They may already be saved by having given themselves substantially to Yeshua, but they may not yet be fully where God wants them to be. Regarding our children, Proverbs 22:6 and Deuteronomy 6:6-7 come to mind:

*“Train a child in the way he [should] go; and, even when old, he will not swerve from it.”*

and

*“These words, which I am ordering you today, are to be on your heart; and you are to teach them carefully to your children. You are to talk about them when you sit at home, when you are traveling on the road, when you lie down and when you get up.”*

These verses are verses that are commanding discipleship and are the very definition of biblical parenting. As for our spouses, husbands are biblically charged with discipling their wives, and wives are charged with submitting to their husbands. First, Ephesians 5:22-33 says:

*“Wives should submit to their husbands as they do to the Lord; because the husband is head of the wife, just as the Messiah, as head of the Messianic Community, is himself the one who keeps the body safe. Just as the Messianic Community submits to the Messiah, so also wives should submit to their husbands in everything.”*

And we should also take note of 1 Corinthians 14:33-35 even though its literal application is somewhat out of date; it reads:

*“As in all the congregations of God's people, let the wives remain silent when the congregation meets; they are certainly not permitted to speak out. Rather, let them remain subordinate, as also the Torah says; and if there is something they want to know, let them ask their own husbands at home; for it is shameful for a woman to speak out in a congregational meeting.”*

These Scriptures speak of husbands discipling their wives which is the expected and preferred situation, but there are exceptions where the wife is spiritually and educationally ahead of her husband and, by her seeking to disciple him, is simply fulfilling her role as his Genesis 2:18 helper:

*“ADONAI, God, said, "It isn't good that the person should be alone. I will make for him a companion suitable for helping him.””*

Now once we have seen to the discipleship of our own families, it is time for us to “...go and make people from all nations into disciples...” But just as discipling our own family comes before discipling others, discipling those in our own community comes before discipling those in other communities. We may be members of several communities (e.g. the neighborhoods in which we live), but the ones I mean are our congregational community and the wider Jewish community of which we claim to be a part.

We are entering a new phase in our congregational life where God is moving Ohev Yisrael toward taking its place as part of, and (in faith) a leader of, the wider Jewish community. Surprising, but we know that it is destined to be, because Romans 11:25-26 tells us:

*“It is that stoniness, to a degree, has come upon Isra'el, until the Gentile world enters in its fullness; and that it is in this way that all Isra'el will be saved. As the Tanakh says, “Out of Tziyon will come the Redeemer; he will turn away ungodliness from Ya'akov...”*”

We are already seeing some of the stoniness dissolve away as God has apparently anointed Rabbi Aaron to lead us in ministering Yeshua to Jewish leaders in Northern Virginia. A contingent of ten Jewish people from a neighboring synagogue has already visited us to hear us explain why we believe in Yeshua, and Rabbi Aaron even now has an appointment to meet with a key Jewish leader (at the leader's invitation) for Aaron to explain to him about Messianic Judaism. Never before in all my life have I experienced or even heard of such things happening.

So, we must be prepared, and that means that those of us who are already adequately discipled must help others in our midst to become discipled. Anointed though Aaron is, he will not be able to serve the needs of all the Jewish people that God will be bringing to us; it will have to be us. Once we disciple enough of our members to the level where they can make disciples on their own, God will give us favor and together we will impact the wider Jewish community as never before. I cannot put dates on it but, according to Scripture, it has to be.

Now there is an interesting aspect to making Jewish disciples that is not quite the same as making Gentile disciples. Making Jewish disciples involves not only bringing Jewish people to know and receive Yeshua, it also involves training them to make disciples of other Jews in a way that the Exodus 19:6 commandment for Israel to be “*a kingdom of priests and a holy nation*” can be fulfilled.

Making Jewish disciples of Yeshua is especially difficult because we Jews have been brought up believing that a Jew ceases to be a Jew or that he is a traitor to Judaism if he or she comes to believe in Yeshua. One can therefore imagine the family and community pressure that is exerted on a Jew to not believe. In reaction to Messianic Jews' and Gentiles' attempts to minister Yeshua to Jewish individuals, the Jewish community has, over time, developed and published specific objections to Yeshua to try to show that He is not who the New Testament says He is. In his five-volume treatise entitled “Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus,” Dr. Michael Brown employs the *Tanakh* and other recognized Jewish sources to refute the most prominent of them, as well as the traditional Jewish belief that there is a binding, authoritative Oral Law that is traceable back to Moses. I encourage all Messianic Jews and Gentiles to read Dr. Brown's books but, realizing that most will not, I at least want all Ohev members, as part of their discipleship training, to be schooled in how to answer the Jewish objections that they are most likely to encounter. This message is not the place to do it, but I will give you some examples of what I mean.

Suppose a knowledgeable Jewish man to whom we are ministering claims that there is an inconsistency between the New Testament passages we showed him that describe God as Father,

Son, and Holy Spirit, and Deuteronomy 6:4 that clearly states that “God is one,” and he challenges us with the question: “How can God be three and one at the same time?” Would our mouths gape open and our best response be “I don’t know, I have to ask my rabbi!”?

Suppose we show him from New Testament Scriptures that Yeshua was born of a Virgin and then try to justify it with Isaiah 7:14 which, in the New King James Version, states:

*“Therefore the Lord Himself will give you a sign: Behold, the virgin shall conceive and bear a Son, and shall call His name Immanuel.” [God with us]?*

If we do, he is likely to say “Gotcha!” and demonstrate to us that the Hebrew word in Isaiah that is translated “virgin” is הַעַלְמָה (*ha-almah*) which literally means “the young woman” – not “virgin.” What would we say to him? Should we have used that verse in the first place? This is the kind of training that our disciplers should have before they venture out to minister Yeshua to the wider Jewish community.

So now let’s say that our discipleship includes Jewish apologetics and we are convicted that we should “go and make disciples” in the Jewish community. Where to go where there will be Jewish people to whom to minister? Well, whether we are Jewish or not Jewish, the first and most logical places are where we normally are, such as at our places of work, at stores where we normally shop, or places we normally frequent for hobby interests or recreation. Jewish people are at those places for the same reasons as we, but how can we initiate conversations? Well, here is one way that I would not recommend:

“Excuse me sir (or madam), you look Jewish, so I would like to tell you that Jesus loves you!”

You will surely start a conversation with that approach, but one that will likely end quickly with the response: “Get out of here before I call a cop!” Or you could wimp out and, instead of engaging persons in conversation, offer Jews-for-Jesus tracts to everyone you see. That is an historical approach that has sometimes borne fruit, but it has contributed to considerable litter as well, and its rate of return has understandably been low. No, I am afraid that you will have to be patient and be alert to opportunities in which the Holy Spirit paves the way for you.

Perhaps one or two of my personal encounters will help. On one occasion, I was insistent that a product I was purchasing contained no pork. The store clerk asked me: “Why are you concerned about it?” I responded, “Because I am a Messianic Jew and we Jews do not eat pork.” He said, “What’s a Messianic Jew?” And we were off and running. Notice that I intentionally said that I was a Messianic Jew and not just a Jew, because had I merely said that I was a Jew, the response would no doubt have simply been: “Oh, I understand.” On another occasion, I was walking on a street in Wheaton, and a man overtook me to inform me that I had lost my *yarmulke* (*kippah* / head covering). He was Jewish, and notice that I was wearing *tzitzit* (fringes) but that there was nothing covering my head. I could have said: “Thank you, mind your own business,” or more politely: “Thank you for telling me.” But I saw the opportunity to engage him and said something to the effect of: “Thank you. I didn’t lose my *kippah*. I am a Messianic Jew and am concerned to obey the biblical commandment to wear *tzitzit* but have chosen to not wear a *kippah*

because it is just a rabbinical requirement and I am concerned that I will be mistaken for Orthodox.” That really perked his interest and we had a lengthy conversation about Messianic Jewish thought while standing on the sidewalk. Of course, not all my encounters have been that peaceful. I have memories years ago of nearly being run over with a car by a man who was furious that I had set up a table with Messianic Jewish literature outside of Katz’s Kosher Market. I got his license tag number and reported the incident to the police along with my list of witnesses to the event. They detained the owner of the car and called me to the police station to identify him as the one who was driving. He was visibly shaken at the prospect of his going to jail, and when the police asked me if I wanted to prosecute, I saw my opportunity. I said that I would not prosecute if the man would allow me ten minutes to tell him what I believed about Yeshua and why I was at Katz’s market handing out Messianic literature. The man took me up on it, and we parted shaking hands.

Well, I have to stop now because my time for giving this message is about up. When I was preparing this message, it was hard for me to stop because the subject is so interesting and the possible ways of both ministering Yeshua and getting into trouble for doing it are so vast. Very soon now, Ohev will be offering some *Bet Midrash* sessions on “Answering Jewish Objections to Jesus,” partially using Dr. Michael Brown’s book as a resource. I recommend that as many of us as possible attend.