

Discipleship

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Some years ago the word “discipleship” acquired a bad connotation among Messianic Jews and some evangelical Christians. It was because certain Christian churches, dubbed “discipleship movement” churches, exceeded their biblical authorization by establishing a structure whereby every member of the church was subjected to the scrutiny, control, and authority of another member that was called his “discipler.” So while professing to be making disciples of Messiah, they were instead making disciples of each other.

That brief period in the church’s history was very destructive because it prejudiced many believers against the words “disciple” and “discipleship,” and against what would have been a true biblical process had it been carried out in the right manner.

Consider, for example, Yeshua’s reference to His disciples in John 13:35:

"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."

And also John 8:31-32:

"Then Yeshua said to those Jews who believed Him, "If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free."

Scripture teaches that another besides Yeshua had disciples – Isaiah! For in Isaiah 8:16 we read:

"Bind up the testimony, Seal the law among my disciples."

But Isaiah’s disciples were not like Yeshua’s disciples in that Isaiah was not their master; they were merely following Isaiah so they could learn how to be prophets. Much later, at a time in history when the title “Rabbi” came to mean “master,” Yeshua warned in Matthew 23:8:

"But you are not to be called 'Rabbi,' for you have only one Master and you are all brothers."

Yeshua was not the only one whom men followed. Scripture also shows that men followed Yeshua’s disciples – especially Paul and Barnabas, for we read in Acts 13:43:

"Now when the congregation had broken up, many of the Jews and devout proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas, who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God."

However, Paul did not allow his follower’s to consider him their master, and made it clear that he was making disciples for Yeshua – not for himself:

1 Corinthians 1:12-15: *"Now I say this, that each of you says, "I am of Paul," or "I am of Apollos," or "I am of Cephas," or "I am of Messiah." Is Messiah divided? Was Paul crucified for you? Or were you baptized in the name of Paul? I thank God that I baptized none of you except Crispus and Gaius, lest anyone should say that I had baptized in my own name."*

Also, 1 Corinthians 3:4-5: *"For when one says, "I am of Paul," and another, "I am of Apollos," are you not carnal? Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers through whom you believed, as the Lord gave to each one?"*

Now that I have said what discipleship is not, let's turn to what it is. Discipleship, simply, is the growth process of becoming more godly – more like Yeshua, and more dependant on Yeshua. It is best illustrated in Matthew 11:28-30:

"Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take My yoke upon you and learn from Me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For My yoke is easy and My burden is light."

Of course, for those of us who have not yet come to Him – never confessed our sins before Him – never asked Him into our heart to be Lord of our lives and been born again of the Spirit – that is the first and most important step toward becoming His disciple.

2 Corinthians 5:17 tells us:

"Therefore, if anyone is in Messiah, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new."

And of course John 3:16 and 17 are well known:

"For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved."

Nothing takes precedent over that, so, if anyone here needs to take that first step of giving yourself to Yeshua, the son of God, to be Lord of your life and your personal savior, don't wait another day. See me or any Ohev leader right after this service and we will show you how you can leave here today, a new person with a new life.

Even those of us who have already taken that first step – who are already believers, born again of the Spirit – we too need to come to Him regularly, confess our sins, and cast our cares upon Him. The degree to which we are willing to do that is a measure of how disciplined we are. Many of us don't do it, or don't do it often, preferring instead, to handle things by ourselves, the way we used to in our old life. There's a 19th century Christian poem (set to music) that I often sing to remind myself not to do that; it goes this way:

What a friend we have in Jesus,

*All my sins and griefs to bear!
What a privilege to carry
Everything to God in prayer!
O what peace we often forfeit,
O, what needless pain we bear,
All because we do not carry
Everything to God in prayer.*

I can't help but think of that song every time I encounter the Matthew 11 Scripture because both of them are true. So why don't we come to Yeshua for His rest when we need Him? It is because of our old habits that we have dragged with us into the Kingdom – worldly pride where we have not yet fully died to self, and given ourselves over to Him completely. But dying to self is what being disciplined means and what Yeshua asks of us, for in Matthew 16:24-25 Yeshua cautioned His disciples:

"If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his stauros (his crucifixion stake) and follow Me. For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it."

And the apostle Paul, perhaps the most highly disciplined person who ever lived said in Galatians 2:20:

"I have been crucified with Messiah; it is no longer I who live, but Messiah lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me."

Hudson Taylor referred to this process as "the exchanged life" because we, who are disciples of Yeshua, are called to exchange our lives for His.

So looking back at Matthew 11:28, the first step in discipleship is heeding Yeshua's words to bring our cares to Him in order to receive rest for our souls. That is the part of being a disciplined person that takes faith – faith to die to self-desire and self-help so that God can take control! Yeshua demonstrated His faith by giving up His life so that we may live. And we who would call ourselves his disciples are called to emulate Him by sacrificing our lives as well – not by dying physically as Yeshua did, but by sacrificial faith – being willing to die to self in order that we may serve others:

Romans 12:1: *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service."*

It is faith to prefer our brother or sister over ourself:

Romans 12:10: *"Be kindly affectionate to one another with brotherly love, in honor giving preference to one another;"*

It is faith to love our neighbor as ourself and to love our enemies:

Matthew 5:44: *"But I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,"*

It is faith to forgive those who have harmed us or would do us harm:

Matthew 18:21-22: *"Then Peter came to Him and said, "Lord, how often shall my brother sin against me, and I forgive him? Up to seven times? Yeshua said to him, "I do not say to you, up to seven times, but up to seventy times seven."*

And Ephesians 4:32: *"And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, just as God in Messiah forgave you."*

So we who would be Yeshua's disciples must first come to Him, and then emulate His life of sacrifice by giving our lives over to Him and to others.

Now let's look at how Yeshua disciplined. The method by which He taught was personal, and He treated His disciples as friends:

John 15:15: *"No longer do I call you servants, for a servant does not know what his master is doing; but I have called you friends, for all things that I heard from My Father I have made known to you."*

Yeshua's disciples followed Him wherever He ministered. They watched Him and sought to do likewise; and when they failed, He corrected them and sent them out to do better next time. That is the ideal of discipleship and the biblical example.

Some of you have expressed a desire to progress in your own level of discipleship, so Ohev Yisrael has embarked upon a two-pronged program to assist you. You no doubt have already noticed Ohev's new educational program on Shabbat afternoon with one of the studies called "Topics for Disciplined Living." Education is an important aspect of discipleship, for in Proverbs 1:5 we read:

"A wise man will hear and increase learning, And a man of understanding will attain wise counsel ..."

And we have already encountered Matthew 11:29 where Yeshua urged:

"Take My yoke upon you and LEARN from Me ..."

But teaching to a group has the limitation of not being able to address everyone's individual needs. That is why Yeshua selected and spent quality personal time with only twelve men – His first disciples. Although Ohev Yisrael does not have Yeshua the man to disciple us personally, we do have each other, and we all have areas of strengths and areas of weakness. In the areas of

our strengths we can disciple others. And to cure our weaknesses, we can receive from others who are stronger. So, next Thursday at 7:30 P.M., I will meet with all those in Ohev who want to be disciplined in a defined area of life, and/or those who are willing to offer their time to impart to others.

Perhaps a brother needs help controlling anger while another brother has that part of his life under control and can help the first. Or perhaps a sister is undisciplined in setting aside time for personal devotions. This other sister who is disciplined in prayer can work with her until the proper habits have been established.

The plan is not to identify, among us, powerhouse disciplers who are so spiritually mature that they can take broad responsibility for discipling others. Even if we found one or two such persons – how many persons could they work with before they would run out of time and become exhausted? So the plan will be to take small bites at discipleship – persons working one-on-one with each other for relatively small periods of time – say three or four weeks – before finishing or moving on to tackle something else with someone else. Some of us can work on perfecting our lives in one area while helping someone else in another area in which we are stronger. That way, we can all progress in small steps and no one need be over-taxed or over-committed.

You will recall that last week I spoke on outreach, and set a goal for Ohev to become known as an outreaching congregation. This week, by announcing our plan for discipleship, we are addressing in-reach, and setting a similar goal.

Perhaps Ohev will never fully achieve perfection; no congregation ever does. But we can be one of the best with the biblical tools and the people God has given us.

I hope to see many of you next Thursday evening. Shabbat shalom!