

Shalom AZ Ministries

In Pursuit of Israel's Redemption



"No Longer Painting By Numbers"

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Devotion and Discussion Questions

Key Texts (TLV): Phil. 3:7-11; 2:5-11; Deut. 10:16; 30:6; Jer. 31:31-33; Matt. 16:26; Is. 64:5

Do you remember painting by numbers as a kid? You opened the box, found the tiny containers of paint, matched each color to its number, and carefully filled in the spaces. If you followed the instructions closely enough, eventually a picture emerged. It could actually look pretty good. But painting by numbers didn't make you an artist. The picture was already drawn. Someone else had determined where every color belonged. You could produce a beautiful picture without ever understanding why the artist put the shadow there, why those colors worked together, or what made the picture beautiful. You could even paint it almost mindlessly. Painting by numbers is useful for a child because it teaches something—but eventually, an artist is supposed to grow beyond simply filling in numbered spaces.

That picture helps us understand what Paul is getting at in Phil. 3. Throughout this letter, Paul has been teaching the Philippians to see life through the mind of Messiah. He has learned to look at suffering, rivals, life, death, success, and loss through a completely different perspective. He has pointed them to Yeshua, who did not exalt Himself but humbled Himself, served, poured Himself out, and became obedient even to death. He has pointed to Timothy and Epaphroditus as men beginning to reflect that same pattern. Now Paul turns the picture toward himself. He had spent his life doing everything "right". His religious résumé was extraordinary. But then Paul encountered the Master. Once he saw Yeshua—once he saw who the Master Artist really was—he realized that much of what he had once regarded as his masterpiece was really just painting by numbers. And now Paul wanted something far deeper: **"I want to know Him."**

1. WHAT I ONCE CALLED GAIN, I NOW CALL LOSS

Paul begins with a remarkable reevaluation of everything he had previously valued: *"But whatever things were gain to me, these I have considered as loss for the sake of the Messiah. More than that, I consider all things to be loss in comparison to the surpassing value of the knowledge of Messiah Yeshua my Lord."* (Phil. 3:7-8). These were not the words of a man who had accomplished nothing. Paul had just listed an impressive résumé: circumcised on the eighth day, of Israel, of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews, a Pharisee, zealous, and—as far as Torah righteousness was concerned—blameless. If righteousness through accomplishment worked in anybody's favor, it worked in Paul's favor. Yet after encountering Yeshua, Paul looks at the things he once counted as *kerdē*—gain, profit, assets—and calls them *zēmīa*—loss, even damage. They were not merely unable to save him; depending upon them had actually prevented him from seeing how desperately he needed Messiah.

It is as though Paul looks back at a wall covered with paintings he had spent his entire life producing and suddenly realizes, "These were paint-by-number pictures." He is not going to double down and insist that they are masterpieces simply because he spent years producing them. Compared with the surpassing value of knowing Yeshua, he calls them *skubala*—refuse, garbage, something to be thrown away. That does not mean Torah was bad or that obedience was meaningless. God has never been interested in empty obedience disconnected from faith

and relationship. Even the Torah said, *“Circumcise the foreskin of **your heart** therefore, and do not be stiff-necked anymore.”* (Deut. 10:16). The problem comes when the thing meant to lead us toward God becomes the thing we trust instead of God. Paul has discovered the treasure of immeasurable value, and once you see the treasure, letting go of everything else is not really losing. You know you are winning the trade.

2. I WANT TO BE FOUND IN HIM

Paul continues, saying that his desire is to *“be found in Him—not having my righteousness derived from Torah, but one that is through trusting in Messiah—the righteousness from God based on trust.”* (Phil. 3:9). Notice where Paul wants to be found. Not standing beside his accomplishments. Not pointing toward the trophies hanging on the wall. He wants to be found **in Messiah**. His confidence is no longer in what he has accomplished in the flesh but in what God has done through Yeshua. This is what Paul had already said earlier in the chapter: we are those who worship by the Spirit of God, glory in Messiah Yeshua, and do not depend upon the flesh. The Lord has always wanted more than outward conformity. He promised through Jeremiah, *“I will put My Torah within them. Yes, I will write it on their heart.”* (Jer. 31:33). God wants the obedience of our lives to flow from hearts that belong to Him.

That is the difference between painting by numbers and learning from the Master Artist. The apprentice does not simply say, “Tell me which color goes in which space. Just give me another rule. Tell me exactly what to do so I don’t have to understand.” The apprentice says, “I want to know Your way. I want to understand Your process. I want to see what You see. I want to know Your heart so deeply that Your heart begins to shape mine.” The goal of walking with Yeshua is not simply becoming better at following religious instructions. It is becoming like Him. It is allowing the Spirit of God to produce something within us that then begins to flow naturally through us. We are no longer simply copying the outside lines of the Master’s work; we are being transformed from within so that His character begins to appear in ours.

3. I WANT TO KNOW HIM IN TOTALITY

Paul finally brings us to the heart of the passage: *“My aim is to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the sharing of His sufferings, becoming like Him in His death—if somehow I might arrive at the resurrection from among the dead.”* (Phil. 3:10–11). Paul does not merely want to know things **about** Yeshua. He wants to know **Him**. And he does not want a carefully selected version of Him. Paul wants the totality of Messiah—the power of His resurrection, yes, but also fellowship in His sufferings and conformity to His death. Yeshua’s life was one of pouring out, serving, sacrificing, forgiving, humbling Himself, and laying Himself down. Resurrection was the glorious outcome, but the road to resurrection passed through the cross. Paul is saying, in effect, “I want to understand the Master’s entire process.”

We often want the masterpiece without the process that created it. We want resurrection power without dying to self. We want spiritual authority without humility. We want the character of Yeshua without the surrender through which that character is formed. But if you are apprenticed to a great artist, you study more than the finished painting. You watch how the Master works. You learn His technique, His patience, His choices, His discipline, and even the places where producing beauty requires struggle. Paul had seen the Master, and now his desire was, “Shape me into His likeness.” Yeshua had taken on our likeness, and now Paul wanted to be

formed into His. Not outwardly. Not superficially. Not as a paint-by-number imitation. Paul wanted the life of Messiah to become the pattern of his character from the inside out.

CONCLUSION

There comes a point when we have to decide whether we simply want God to give us another set of numbered spaces or whether we really want to know the Master. It can feel safer to say, “Lord, just tell me exactly what to do.” Rules can feel measurable. Accomplishments can be counted. Religious trophies can be displayed. But Paul had lived that life, and after encountering Yeshua he said, essentially, “You can have all my trophies.” Everything he had trusted, everything he had leaned on, everything he might have pointed to as proof of his righteousness faded compared to the surpassing value of knowing Messiah. As Isaiah says, *“All our righteousness is like a filthy garment.”* (Is. 64:5). Once we truly see Him, our greatest accomplishments stop looking nearly as impressive.

Today, ask the Lord, “Where am I still trusting the picture I have produced instead of trusting You? Where am I merely following outward lines without allowing You to transform my heart?” Today, lay down the résumé. Lay down the trophies. Lay down the righteousness you have tried to manufacture for yourself. And say with Paul, “Yeshua, I want to know Your heart. I want Your mind. I want to become like You in the way I love, serve, forgive, humble myself, suffer, surrender, and live. I want to be found in You. Take my life out of the paint-by-numbers book and make it something that genuinely reflects the beauty of the Master.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. Why did Paul come to regard the very things he had once considered “gain” as loss after encountering Messiah Yeshua?
2. What is the difference between outward religious obedience and obedience that flows from a heart transformed by relationship with God?
3. Are there accomplishments, traditions, credentials, spiritual disciplines, or areas of “good behavior” in your own life that you may be tempted to depend upon rather than Messiah?
4. In what area of your life are you most tempted to ask God simply to “tell me exactly what to do” instead of seeking to know His heart and become more like Him?
5. Paul wanted to know both the power of Yeshua’s resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings. What might it look like in your life right now to embrace the humility, service, sacrifice, or dying-to-self that is part of becoming like Messiah?

CLOSING PRAYER

Father, thank You for Messiah Yeshua, and for the righteousness that comes from You through faith. Forgive us for the places where we have trusted what we have done more than we have trusted You. Help us to lay down every trophy, every achievement, and every source of confidence in the flesh that keeps us from seeing the surpassing value of knowing You. Yeshua, we want to know You. We want to know Your heart, Your ways, the power of Your resurrection, and even the fellowship of Your sufferings. Shape us into Your likeness. Give us Your mind. Teach us to humble ourselves, to serve, to love, to forgive, to surrender, and to pour ourselves out for others. Holy Spirit, write the heart of Your Torah upon us so that our obedience flows from genuine relationship with You. May our lives no longer be paint-by-number copies, but living works that reflect the beauty and character of the Master Artist.

B'Shem Yeshua, In the name of Yeshua, amen.