

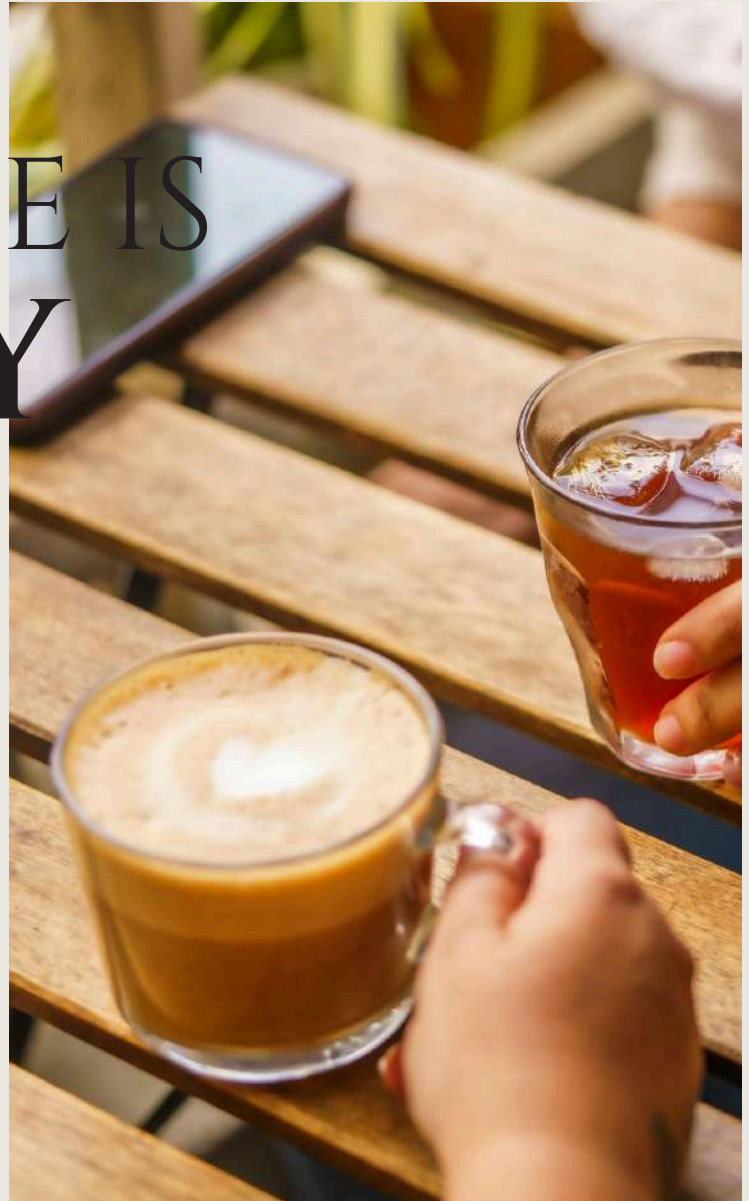
BENJAMIN JUSTER

WHEN PREFERENCE IS PRIORITY

I prefer coffee over tea. I would rather live in a warm climate than a cold one. I like dark chocolate over milk chocolate, and I remain unconvinced that white chocolate is chocolate. Give me an expertly grilled steak over chicken, and asparagus instead of green beans. Life is full of such preferences.

Our preferences follow us into congregational life. I enjoy worship that is intimate and unplugged. I generally prefer a thirty-minute sermon to an hour-long exposition. Someone sitting beside me may feel exactly the opposite. We can both love the Lord deeply and have very different ideas about a wonderful service.

In Messianic congregations, the possibilities multiply. Some want more liturgy; others want less. Some desire more Hebrew, while others struggle to follow what is already included. One person longs for a weekly Torah service. Another wants more explicit mention of Yeshua. Still another wonders why so many songs are in a minor key.



And, of course, no leader has ever discovered a room temperature that satisfies everyone!

After several decades of serving in various ministry capacities, I have noticed how easily preferences become priorities. Something we enjoy gradually becomes something we expect. Eventually, we may treat it as something we must have in order to remain connected.

This can leave us unsettled and dissatisfied, even in a community where God is working. We begin noticing everything that falls short of our expectations. Conversations take on a critical tone. Subtle undercurrents of division develop. Sometimes wonderful people walk away from meaningful relationships because the community does not consistently meet their preferences.

There is nothing wrong with enjoying certain expressions of worship or thoughtfully communicating what helps us engage. Leaders benefit from hearing the needs of those they serve. The question is whether our preferences have become the standard by which we judge the whole community.

I believe spiritual maturity becomes evident when we grow more concerned about helping those around us connect with God. We begin asking, "How might this serve someone else?" That question can change our experience of an entire service.

A song we would never choose may help another person express love for the Lord. A liturgical prayer may give someone language for grief or gratitude. An extended time of teaching may bring clarity to a person wrestling with Scripture. When we notice what God is doing in others, we discover reasons to rejoice beyond our own enjoyment.



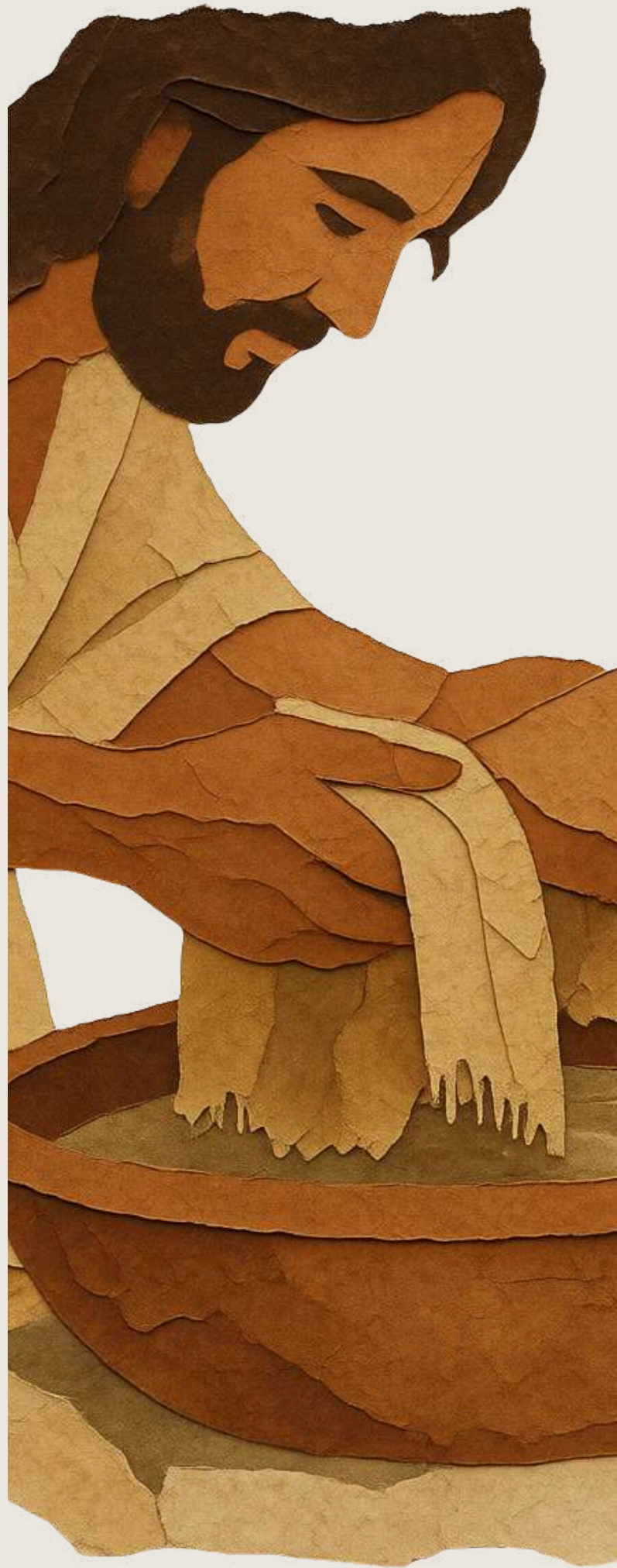
Paul writes, *“Be tenderly devoted to one another in brotherly love; outdo one another in giving honor”* (Romans 12:10, TLV). Other translations express this as “preferring one another.” What a beautiful redirection of our hearts! We can use our energy to honor people, making room for their needs and celebrating their growth.

Philippians 2:3-5 brings this into focus: *“Do nothing out of selfishness or conceit, but with humility consider others as more important than yourselves, looking out not only for your own interests but also for the interests of others. Have this attitude in yourselves, which also was in Messiah Yeshua”* (TLV).

Notice that Paul includes our own interests. We have needs, and those needs matter. Yet love widens our attention to include the people beside us. First Corinthians 10:24 states it plainly: *“Let no one seek his own good, but the good of his neighbor”* (TLV).

Yeshua gives us a powerful picture of this in John 13. The One worthy of all honor rises from the meal, takes a towel, and washes His disciples’ feet. He stoops before the very people who should have been serving Him.

Imagine being in that room. Dusty feet. A basin of water. The hands of the Master doing the work of a servant. His greatness is expressed through love willing to stoop. He then calls His disciples to follow His example.





That invitation reaches into our congregational life. We may never pick up a literal basin, but opportunities to serve surround us. We can welcome a newcomer, encourage a weary worship leader, or participate wholeheartedly in a service we would have planned differently. Each response gives honor to someone else.

This requires discernment. Preferences about style differ from concerns involving biblical faithfulness, integrity, or harmful conduct. Those concerns deserve honest attention. Yet when the issue is simply that something is not how we like it, the Lord may be inviting us to grow in love.

Here are three ways we can respond:

1. Identify one preference you have elevated into a requirement. Ask the Lord to show you where disappointment has become criticism. Before the next service, pray, “Yeshua, help me receive what You are doing here and see whom You are blessing.” Enter with an expectant heart.

2. Intentionally honor someone whose preferences differ from yours. Ask what helps that person connect with God. Listen with curiosity. Encourage their participation, and thank those who serve the community. Understanding another person’s heart often softens our insistence on having things our way.



3. Choose one act of service each week. Welcome someone, pray with a person who needs encouragement, or help with a practical task. If you have feedback, share it humbly with the appropriate leader. Let your contribution strengthen the relationships God has entrusted to you.

As we practice these things, we can learn to rest even when everything is not exactly as we would prefer. We can worship with gratitude, receive with humility, and remain connected through ordinary disappointments. There is real freedom in that kind of maturity. We may be surprised to find that a service we once would have dismissed becomes a place of encounter. As our attention turns toward the Lord and His people, our capacity to receive from Him can grow too.

I will probably continue choosing coffee, dark chocolate, and a warm climate. But I want the Lord to keep shaping my heart so that, among His people, love has priority. May we become communities where each person helps another draw near to God, and where honoring one another becomes one of our greatest joys.

 **Benjamin Juster**
Editor in Chief

Preferences
about style
differ from
concerns
involving
biblical
faithfulness,
integrity,
or harmful
conduct.

BENJAMIN JUSTER