

## 84 – Equipping Disciples

John 15:7 – 16

To become a disciple of Jesus Christ requires enormous sacrifice. Basically, it requires a person to give Jesus the control of their life. From that point on, he or she will choose, over and over again, to live in such a way as to do whatever they can to help others meet Him. When Jesus called someone He never hid that fact from them. He never lured anyone with false promises of an easy life. Instead, He did the opposite. He warned them that following Him would cost them everything, but He also assured them that if they chose that path, it would lead to eternal life, not only for them, but for many more who would come to Him through them. Those who gave up everything to follow Him, would be given the spiritual resources they needed to become highly effective ministers. No one was being asked to sacrifice their pleasures and ambitions in exchange for a meagre life of self-denial. He wasn't making those demands to be mean. He was asking people to trade in those things for something far better. Those who chose to "deny themselves daily and take up their cross and follow Him" (Lk 9:23) would be given gifts which would transform each one of them into a disciple who would change the world. They would be empowered to do the most important work a human being can do. They would be partnering with God to save lost people. Through them He would change eternal destinies.

Within hours Jesus would be taken away from those eleven men, so He wasted no words in warning them about the dangers that lay ahead. But He also wasted no words in promising them that God would give them the spiritual resources they would need to be successful in their discipleship. And as we listen to the wonderful promises He made that night, it's important that you and I remember that both His warnings and His promises were meant for a greater audience than those disciples huddled around Him on that moonlit night. They were meant for every man or woman who would follow in their footsteps (Jn 17:20). They were meant for you and me, if we have chosen to become His disciples. And those promises will equip us just as powerfully as they equipped them. If we learn to receive the gifts He promised that night, we too will bear "much fruit." Let's listen to each one and learn to walk in its power.

### Conditional promises

There are times when God gives unconditional promises. He says, "I'm going to do this whether you obey Me or not." But most of the promises we find in the Bible are conditional promises. God says, "If you will do this, then I will do that." To receive a conditional promise a person must do what God requires. And as we listen to those promises Jesus made that evening, most of them were conditional promises. He repeatedly used the word "if." If they would remain in Him, if they would obey His commands, if they would love one another, then wonderful resources would be given to them. They would receive the same gifts that He had received.

### Seven gifts

After using a grapevine to illustrate how important it was for His disciples to remain attached to Him (Jn 15:1-6), Jesus went on to describe the gifts they would receive if they obeyed. If they would continue to stay attached, to believe in Him and depend on Him, He would give them all the resources they would need to succeed. As I study this passage, I recognize seven such gifts. He mentions more elsewhere, but today let's study these seven. Each is an essential part of the equipment a disciple needs to fulfill Jesus' calling. Each brings the power we need to be fruitful. They are some of the treasures we've turned our backs on the world to possess, so let's examine them one by one:

1. **Powerful prayer (v7):** If you and I are going to be fruitful we must be able to pray with great authority. Jesus prayed with great authority because He walked in careful obedience to the Father. His prayers were always answered because He always asked for what God led Him to ask for. That evening He said to His disciples, "If you remain in Me (stay attached) and My sayings remain in you (stay obedient), whatever you ask shall happen to you" (literal). In other words, He promised them a prayer life as effective as His own. If they would let Him guide them; if they would listen before they asked, when they asked they would receive. And that's exactly what John heard Him say, because years later, in a letter, John wrote:  
"This is the confidence which we have before Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us. And if we know He hears us [in] whatever we ask, we know we have the requests which we have asked of Him" (1Jn 5:14, 15).  
To be fruitful disciples, you and I must be able to pray powerful prayers. That's the foundation of all effective ministry. When Jesus prayed things happened. People were healed, delivered, guided, and comforted. They listened to what He said, because they saw what He did. And those things happened because God was answering His prayers. So, the first gift Jesus gave that evening was the key that unlocks our prayer life. If we will walk with Him as He walked with the Father, we too will pray prayers He will answer.
2. **Much fruit (v8):** The next statement Jesus made was this, "By this was My Father glorified, that you bear much fruit, and you will be My disciples" (literal). That tells us the scope of God's plans for each of Jesus' disciples. The Father is glorified when Jesus' disciples bear much fruit, not a little fruit. Now, you and I aren't able to measure fruitfulness the way God can. We have no idea what the result will be when we bring the love of Jesus to one person. We don't know how many will be reached because we reached that one particular person. We don't know the lasting impact of a kind word or deed. But God does, and His promise is that if we allow Jesus to lead us, we will produce much fruit. So the second gift Jesus gave His disciples is great potential. He revealed the will of God. That meant that if we obey Jesus, we will, in one way or another effect the eternity of many. And that shouldn't surprise us because the God we serve always does "more abundantly than all we ask or think, according to the power that works within us" (Eph 3:20).



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3. God's attending presence (vs9, 10): The evidence of God's favor was present in everything Jesus did. When He spoke, the Spirit confirmed His words. When He prayed, His prayers were answered. And whenever He ministered, you could sense that the presence of God was there. He was immersed in an atmosphere of continual protection and provision. It was evident to all who watched and listened, that God loved Him. That's what made it so hard for His critics. They were trying to deny what was obvious to everyone. And that abiding presence of God was the third gift Jesus promised His disciples. He said, "If you keep My commands, you will remain in My love, just as I have kept My Father's commands and remain in His love" (literal). He wasn't implying by that statement that God withdraws His affection every time someone disobeys. He had already made it abundantly clear that God loved even those who don't know Him (Jn 3:16). His point was that by our obedience we too will remain in a place where God can openly show His love and approval of us, by surrounding us with His presence.
4. Sustaining joy (v11): Nothing brings a disciple greater joy than seeing God work in and through us. So, the fourth gift Jesus promised His disciples was that, if they would obey as He had obeyed, they would experience the same joy He experienced. He called that joy, "My joy." In other words, their hearts would be filled with His joy when they watched lost people come to salvation, or saw someone healed, or used the authority of His name to rescue someone from oppression, or felt strengthened as they stepped out to minister. That was His source of joy (Heb 12:2), and it would soon become theirs as well.
5. A devoted community (vs12, 13): Everything Jesus taught that evening assumed that His disciples would be part of a community of believers. That community was His fifth gift to them. If they were to become fruitful, they must not allow their love for one another to die. They must not become isolated. He said, "This is My command, that you love one another as I loved you. Greater love than this has no one, that he would lay down his life for his friends" (literal). He wanted them to see the depth of His love for them, that love would soon lead Him to the cross, but He also wanted them to understand how important it would be that they love each other the same way. Each of them was designed by God to function as a part of a diverse, interdependent, harmonious team. And it would be that team, that community, that would enable each member to bear much fruit. So when disagreements, envy, strife or insults arose, those must be addressed properly so that their love for each other was restored. That love was essential. It made community possible, and community made fruitfulness possible.
6. Open communication (vs14, 15): Those who chose to obey Him, Jesus said, would also enter into a very privileged relationship with Him. He would call them "friends." Listen: "You are My friends if you do what I command you. No longer do I call you slaves, because the slave does not know what His master does; but I have called you friends, because all things which I have heard from the Father I have made known to you" (literal). To be Jesus' friend meant that He would disclose to that person all that He heard from the Father. An obedient disciple would not only receive commands, but would be given revelation along with those commands. A slave was expected to obey without understanding, but a friend would be told why the command had been given. One of the greatest examples of this type of friendship with God is Abraham. God called him, "My friend" (Isa 41:8; Jas 2:23). If we think back on the events in his life we'll recognize that God repeatedly communicated with Abraham at a very open level. At times, He told him what He was going to do, and even explained why He would do them (Ge 15:1-21; 18:1-33; 22:1-19). He taught Abraham His ways and took him into His counsel. So, the sixth gift Jesus promised His disciples was open communication. He would teach them as freely as the Father had taught Him.
7. An inner assurance (v16): The seventh, and final gift was a brief, but powerful reminder that Jesus was confident that His disciples would succeed. He said, "You did not choose Me, but I chose you and appointed you that you would go and bear fruit and that your fruit would remain..." (literal). In effect, He told them, "You didn't start this relationship, I did. I wanted you, and came after you. I know that you can bear fruit. That's why I'm telling you these things. I chose you because I'm confident that you will draw people to Me who will be with Me forever" (paraphrase). With those words He placed within them an inner assurance. Even if they doubted themselves, they knew He believed in them.

## Summary

In order to do what Jesus did, we need the same resources Jesus had. We too need to be able to pray powerful prayers; we too need to believe that God wants us to reach many; we need the Father's love to attend us when we minister as much as He did; our hearts, like His heart, need to be lifted by the joy of seeing lives changed; we too need to be surrounded by a community of people who love us; we need Jesus to explain God's truth to us as openly as the Father explained it to Him; and finally, each of us needs to know Jesus believes that we can bear lasting fruit for Him.

That night, Jesus promised those eleven men all these things. Today, He promises them to us. Do we believe Him?

## Questions

- 1) Have you prayed a powerful prayer? Have you asked God for something, and He gave it to you? What did you ask for? How did He answer?
- 2) Do you have a community of people who know you and love you? How do those people strengthen you? How do you strengthen them?
- 3) Did you find Jesus, or did He find you? Tell us how you met Him.