

Creekside Community Church  
 Lessons from the Vineyard: John 15  
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### **Disciple-making and the Gospel: John 15:16**

Have you ever accomplished something because someone else thought you could? Perhaps you said, *"I can't do this"* But someone said, *"Sure you can."* And that person simply wouldn't allow you to quit. And so, you didn't. And you accomplished something you didn't think possible. At some point, every one of us needs that kind of encouragement. It's why teams need coaches. Coaches push us farther than we'd push ourselves. Tom Landry once described coaching as *"getting people to do what they don't want to do, to achieve what they want to achieve."* We need people to push us. That's why each morning, Kshelle and I get up and put our *T-25 Beach Body* workout DVD into the laptop. And we listen to Shaun T. – our trainer – scream motivational platitudes at us as we squat, and lunge and dry-heave. Why? Because we need someone to make us do things we don't want to do – or, don't think we *can* do – to accomplish what we want to accomplish. This is largely what parenting is all about, isn't it? *"Dad, I can't do it."* *"Yes you can, get in the pool."* *"Mom, I can't do it!"* *"Yes you can, get back on the bike."* *"I can't do it."* *"Yes you can. Eat your..."* fill in the blank. There are people in our lives with a broader perspective. They see the bigger picture. They see what we could accomplish, *if* we tried. And if I listen to them – rather than myself – I will accomplish things I didn't think I could.

In Matthew 28, Jesus tells his followers to, *"go and make disciples."*<sup>1</sup> Jesus commands us to go and teach people about him so that they trust him, and know him, and begin to think like he thinks, and speak how he speaks, and live how he lives. Many people want to discover their purpose; their life-calling. But if you follow Jesus, you already have a purpose. Jesus has already written a mission statement for your life; make disciples. Now, we each fulfill that mission in different ways. But we all have the same goal. Our purpose is to glorify God by imitating Jesus, and teaching others about him. That's God's purpose for my life. And that's the measure of my life. Regardless of my accomplishments, or my accolades, or my achievements; if I'm not making disciples, I'm not living for what truly matters.

This is our mission, church. It's our mandate. And let's be honest; this is absolutely overwhelming, isn't it? Jesus wants us to go to every people group – all 24,000 of them – and teach them everything we possibly can about him. In effect, Jesus is saying, *"go everywhere you can, and teach everyone you can, everything you can about me."* And I don't know about you, but when I hear Jesus' command, something deep within me says, *"I can't. Jesus' I can't do that."* Our task is overwhelming.

And that's why it's so critical for us to have Jesus' perspective on our mission. See, if we

think this depends completely on us, we're doomed; because by ourselves, we can't do this. This is "*Mission Impossible*." But fundamentally, this doesn't depend on us. It depends on Jesus. Jesus will build his church.<sup>2</sup> And he lived and died and rose again to ensure that this mission would be accomplished. Jesus wants to make disciples. And he lives in us, so that we can make disciples. And if I believe this, I'll obey him; not because I'm confident in myself, but because I'm confident in him, and his redemptive purpose for my life. This is not about me doing my best for Jesus, but Jesus doing his best through me. It's not about me saying, "*I can do this*." It's about me saying, "*Jesus will do this through me*." And if we believe that, we'll try. We'll try to make disciples. And Jesus *will* accomplish more through us than we ever thought possible.

Today, we're concluding our series on John 15, which we've entitled *Lessons from the Vineyard*. John 15 is part of Jesus' last conversation with His disciples before the cross. And Jesus is preparing them for the big change that's about to occur in their relationship with Him. In John 15, Jesus explains how God will no longer work in the world through one perfect Man, but through many imperfect people in whom the Perfect Man now lives; which is why Jesus compares our relationship with Him to a vine, and its branches. Just as a branch cannot bear fruit unless it stays connected to the vine, so we cannot bear fruit unless we stay connected to Jesus. Today, I just want to reiterate something that my dad said at the very beginning of this series; *Jesus makes disciples*. Jesus is the vine. He's our source of life. Apart from him, we have no spiritual life; no relationship with God, no supernatural power, or peace, or love. And as branches, our primary job is to stay close to him. But Jesus' job isn't just to give us life, but to give others life through us. Jesus saves us, to save others through us. And this reality – that Jesus saves us to work through us – is central to the gospel message.

At Creekside, we talk a lot about the gospel. The gospel is the good news of salvation in Jesus Christ. The Bible is a rescue story; a story about how Jesus comes to rescue us – and all of creation – from sin and death. Jesus takes on our humanity, and unites himself to us. And he lives as our representative, so that his perfect life can be credited to our account. Then, he dies as our substitute, and suffers God's judgment against our sin. And he rises from the dead, conquering our enemies, so that we can live forever with him. That's the gospel. And when we talk about the gospel, we often focus on what Jesus has saved us *from*. Jesus has saved us from sin, and from hell, and from death. And all of that gloriously true. But it's also incomplete; because the gospel isn't just salvation from. It's salvation for. Jeff Vanderstelt says the gospel is a *from-for* reality; and, a *to-through* reality. God saves us from something, for something. And he gives blessings to us, in order to give blessings through us. And we see this dynamic throughout the biblical story.

In Genesis 12, God calls Abraham into a relationship with himself. And he says to Abraham; "*I will make you a great nation, And I will bless you, And make your name great; And so you shall be a blessing...<sup>3</sup> And in you all the families of the earth will be blessed.*"<sup>3</sup> God gives blessings to Abraham, in order to give blessings through Abraham. And as a result, the whole

world is blessed. We see something similar in the story of Israel. God saves Israel from slavery Egypt. And then, in Exodus 19, he says, *“you will be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.”*<sup>4</sup> God says that the Israelites will be his priests. In other words, they’ll represent God to the world. And Israel will be a distinct kind of people who reveal God’s character, and draw the surrounding nations to him. So God saves Israel from slavery for a greater purpose. And the same is true for us. But what does Jesus save us for? What’s his redemptive purpose for our lives? We find the answer in John 15:16.

In verse 16, Jesus says this to his disciples, *“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....”* Jesus says, *“Guys, don’t think too highly of yourselves. You didn’t pick me. I picked you.”* The disciples didn’t pick Jesus. They weren’t present at Jesus’ birth. As the angels announced his arrival, they didn’t come up to Mary and Joseph and say, *“hey...uh...parents...how you doing? We were just reading our Old Testaments. And we figured out that the Savior of the world would be born right here, and right now. Crazy, right? So, if it’s okay with you, we’re going to start following him now.”* No. The disciples didn’t even know who Jesus was until Jesus found them; until he picked them out of the crowd, and said *“follow me.”* So the disciples have no reason to boast in their relationship with Jesus. Jesus chose them. And according to verse 16, He chose them for four reasons; first, to be a *people*; second, to live *set apart*; third, to fulfill a greater *purpose*; and fourth, to *reproduce*. Now, in context, Jesus is talking about his relationship with the disciples. But what he says applies to every Christian, because when Jesus graciously chooses to save us, he saves us to be a people, to live set apart, to serve a greater purpose, and ultimately to reproduce. Put simply, Jesus saves us to make disciples. So let’s look at each of these more closely, and how each of these contributes to disciple-making.

**1. Saved to be a people:** First, Jesus saves us to be a people. He doesn’t save us for isolation, but for fellowship with one another. Jesus tells the disciples, *“I chose you (plural).”* Jesus chooses this group of disciples. And he *“appoints”* them; which could also be translated, *“set apart.”* So in Jesus’ eyes, this little rag-tag group of disciples is *“chosen,”* and, *“set apart.”* And it’s clear that Jesus is borrowing this language from the Old Testament. In Deuteronomy 7, Moses says to the nation of Israel, *“For you are a holy people to the LORD your God; the LORD your God has chosen you to be a people for His own possession out of all the peoples who are on the face of the earth.”*<sup>5</sup> In Leviticus 20, God says to Israel, *“Thus you are to be holy to Me, for I the LORD am holy; and I have set you apart from the peoples to be Mine.”*<sup>6</sup> God chooses and sets apart Israel as his special possession. But Jesus chooses and sets apart the disciples as his special possession. And this is hugely significant. Jesus is declaring that the disciples are now the true people of God. Remember, Jesus calls himself the vine. In the Old Testament, Israel is called the vine. But Israel was unfruitful. She failed to share God’s life with the world. But Jesus is the true vine – the true and better Israel – who gives eternal life to all

who believe in him. And the disciples are connected to Jesus, so they are the true people of God. So Jesus picks the disciples to live as God's chosen community in the world.

And Jesus saves us for the exact same purpose. In Titus 2:14, Paul says that, *"[Jesus] gave Himself for us to redeem us from every lawless deed, and to purify for Himself a people for His own possession...."* Jesus didn't die to create a bunch of disconnected individuals, but to create a people. As Tim Chester and Steve Timmis say, *"We are not saved individually and then choose to join the church as if it were some club or support group. Christ died for his people, and we are saved when by faith we become part of the people for whom Christ died."*<sup>7</sup> When Jesus brings us to God, he brings us to each other. When he reconciles this relationship; he reconciles these relationships. So if you're a Christian, these are your people. And that can be difficult to grasp, because at face value, we don't seem to have much in common. I've met many Christians who find it hard to connect with other believers. When they look at the church, they think, *"these aren't my people."* And in one sense, they're absolutely right. Don Carson, says that, *"the church...is not made up of natural 'friends.' It is made up of natural enemies. What binds us together is not common education...race...income levels ...politics ...nationality ...accents...jobs, or anything of the sort."*<sup>8</sup> Jesus saves people from every tribe, tongue; and background. And he brings people together who aren't just different; but who would naturally be divided.

Just think about the people Jesus calls to follow him. Matthew was a Tax-Collector. He collected taxes from the Jews for the Romans, who were an occupying force in Israel. So you have Matthew – an Israelite – who is actively helping Israel's oppressors. And then you have Simon, who was a zealot. And the zealots wanted to overthrow the Roman establishment through acts of violence. I mean, you think political debates on Twitter are heated. Imagine the conversations these guys must have had as they ate dinner with Jesus.

But see, this is why Christian community is so powerful. When people who are naturally divided, unite around Jesus, they testify to his reconciling power. The Apostle Paul says that the church reveals the manifold wisdom of God.<sup>9</sup> We reveal God's great wisdom; his brilliant plan of reconciliation. When we stick it out, and listen to each other, and learn from each other, and serve, and forgive, and mourn with, and bear with, and make peace with each other, and seek to grow in our agreement about the faith, we demonstrate that Jesus is powerful enough to break down the walls dividing us. And this testifies to Jesus' power to reconcile us; not just to each other, but also to God. And this draws the world to Jesus. When people see Jesus draw us together, it moves them to believe in his reconciling work. And as a result, they come to believe in Jesus and follow him. So when we pursue unity, we draw people to trust in and follow Jesus.

And I hope that encourages you. When unity is hard – when it takes work – that's when it really glorifies Jesus, because it demonstrates his power to overcome divisions. And the reality is this; if you're a Christian, your deepest desire is to know Christ; to become like him. And every other genuine Christian shares that desire. Christ lives in you. Christ lives in them. So at the deepest core of your identity, you have something in common. These *are* your people.

And if you're drawn to Christ, you'll be drawn to Christians. I can't tell you how many weird relationships I've had with other believers. I've experienced deep connection with people who don't look like me, who don't talk like me, who haven't had my experiences; people who are young, and people who are old; like even older than my dad. Why? Because Christ lives in them. And they encourage me to know him more. Jesus saves us to make us a people who display his reconciling power. And this draws people to believe in him, and follow him.

**2. Saved to live set apart:** Second, Jesus saves us to live *set apart*. He saves us to be distinct, and to live lives that are devoted to him. Jesus tells the disciples that he has, "*appointed*" them. As I noted earlier, that word can also be translated, "*set apart*." When God sets something apart, that means it's his. Another word for this is, "*holy*." In Scripture, if something is, "*holy*," it belongs to God. And when Jesus dies for us, he sets us apart. He makes us holy. So now, we belong to God. We have a new status. We are God's possession. And because we belong to God, we are to live how God wants us to live. And Jesus gives us a new nature to live this kind of life. When Jesus goes to the cross, he takes me with him. And he kills the old me. And he raises up a new me; a me that wants to please God. Jesus dies to purify me. He gives me a new heart, that's receptive to God's laws. And he gives me his Spirit, who empowers me to obey. So Jesus saves me to sanctify me; to make me pure and righteous like he is. Jesus is committed to making me like him. He's even more committed to this than I am. And I can either fight this process. Or, I can cooperate with it.

I come from a family of swimmers. But sadly, I didn't inherit the swimming gene. I'm like the cat in a family of fish. And whenever I go to the ocean, I struggle. I can't swim with the waves. I work against them. It looks like I'm in a bar fight with the wave. But here's the thing about waves; you can't win a fight against a wave. You either cooperate, or you lose. In fact, the harder you try to win, the harder you lose.

And that's a lot like Christian growth. Jesus wins. And you can fight against him, but it's miserable. The Apostle John says, "*No one who is born of God practices sin, because His seed abides in him; and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.*"<sup>10</sup> John isn't saying that Christians never sin. He's saying Christians can't make a practice of sin. They can't keep on mindlessly, happily sinning. Why? Because they have God's nature within them; God's seed. And that seed is growing, and it's producing new spiritual desires; desires to please God. And so when Christians sin, there's a conflict of desires; there's internal turmoil. And the harder you try to sin, the more miserable you become. And God makes sure of that. He's committed to making you miserable until you repent; because sin will ruin you, and God loves you too much to leave you in sin. So Jesus is committed to making us godly. He saves us to live a distinct kind of life; a life that looks like his. And as we live this kind of life, people notice. They're attracted to our Christlikeness. And then, they're attracted to Christ. They want to know more about him. And in this way, our distinct way of life draws people to Jesus.

**3. Saved for a purpose:** Jesus saves us to be a people. He saves us to live set apart. And

third, he saves us for a greater purpose. According to verse 16, Jesus appoints the disciples to *go*; to go into the world, and participate in Jesus' mission. And the same is true for us. Jesus saves us, to send us. And we've been set apart from the world, for the world. We live like Jesus not just for our own benefit, but for the benefit of others. And whether we realize it or not, we've already been sent by Jesus on his mission to make disciples.

Imagine for a moment that you decided to leave America. You sold your house. You packed up your bags. And you went to an unreached part of the world – a place where people didn't know about Jesus. And you went there to start a church; a movement of indigenous Christians. And you had to become part of the culture. You had to start a new career, and buy a new home, and find a new school for your kids. You had to learn the language and the customs. How would you view your life? What would be your primary concern? Would it be, *"How can I make the most money?"* *"How can I give my kids the most comfortable life possible?"* No, your primary concern would be, *"are we accomplishing the mission? Are we reaching people?"* And you'd view your whole life through that lens. Where you worked; where you lived; how you spent your time; you'd see those things as means of advancing the mission; as opportunities to serve people, and tell them about Jesus.

And if you're a Christian, here's the reality; that cross-cultural missionary is *you*. You're *already* that person. According to the Bible, our true home is heaven. Paul says our citizenship is in heaven; which means that America isn't our home. Peter says that in this world, we are foreigners and exiles.<sup>11</sup> Jesus has sent us to this foreign land. God gives us a green card. We're here short term to learn the culture, the language, and the customs. And we're ambassadors of Jesus, the King of Heaven. And in every sphere of life – at work, in the neighborhood, as we're running errands – we are ambassadors. And we have the opportunity to do good works, and speak good words, so that people come to know our King.

And Jesus has already equipped us to do these things. In Ephesians 2:10, Paul says, *"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."* God has given us the power to do act like Jesus; to bless people, and serve people; and to reenact Jesus' love as we serve others. We have power to do good works. And, God has given us the power to speak good words. When we talk about Jesus, the Holy Spirit gives us words to say. And he convicts hearts, and brings people to trust in Jesus. In Matthew 10, Jesus sends his followers out to preach the gospel. And before sending them out, he gives the most terrifying motivational speech in history. He says, *"ok disciples, listen up. I'm sending you out as sheep in the midst of the wolves. People will malign you. They'll take you to court. And powerful men will arrest you. They'll put on you trial. And then, they'll flog you with whips."* Pretty motivational, right? This isn't what you're supposed to say during the pre-game pep-talk. But, then Jesus says something even crazier. He says, *"oh, but don't worry about these things. Have no fear."* *"Don't worry? Are you kidding me, Jesus?"* You tell me not to worry, after giving me every reason to worry?!" Jesus says the disciples shouldn't

worry! Why? Because, Jesus says, the Holy Spirit will go with them. The Spirit will give his disciples supernatural boldness, and wisdom.<sup>12</sup> And just before Jesus ascends to heaven, he tells the disciples, “...you will receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) Jesus gives us the Spirit; who uses our testimony about Jesus to save others.

So we’re already on mission. We’ve already been sent by Jesus to the people in our sphere of influence. And we already have power from God to bless people, to serve them, and to tell them about Jesus. We’ve been called and equipped for mission. And living on mission isn’t necessarily about adding things to your schedule. It’s more about living your present life more intentionally. It’s living everyday life with gospel intentionality.<sup>13</sup> It means stopping to talk with your neighbors; asking how they’re doing; offering to help with yard-work; participating in community events; volunteering; inviting people into your home. And, living missionally means prayerfully seeking opportunities to talk about Jesus. This doesn’t mean we manipulate conversations, and try to sneak in a gospel presentation. At minimum, it just means we talk like we’re actually Christians, even when we’re not talking to Christians. For example, if I’m talking to a friend about what we’ve been reading, I’ll share what God has been teaching me from the Bible. If someone tells me about a hardship, I tell them I’m going to pray for them. And then, I’ll actually pray for them, and follow up with them, and see how they’re doing. I think one of our dangers as Christians is to focus solely on the “good works” part of mission, and never speak good words; to censor our words too much when we’re around non-believers. And we try to live exemplary lives, and hope that someday, maybe 15 years down the road, our friends ask us, “you know I’ve noticed that you are incredible. Tell me, why do you live like this? Tell me all about your core beliefs.” I don’t know about you, but this has never happened to me. The reality is, if we’re covert about our faith, it just gets harder and harder to share it. And if we do eventually talk about it, it’s like we’ve been hiding this secret from them. And it’s awkward. Remember, the Holy Spirit speaks through us. He gives us the words. Don’t push an agenda. Just talk like a Christian; talk authentically about your faith. And see what the Spirit does.

**4. Saved to reproduce:** Jesus saves us to be a people who draw others to him. He saves us to live set apart and show people what he’s like. He saves us for a greater purpose; to do good works and speak good words so that people trust in him. And finally, he saves us to reproduce. That’s the end result. Jesus tells his followers that he has appointed them to go, and bear fruit. And in context, the “fruit” he’s talking about is more disciples. And Jesus says that this fruit “will remain.” In other words, the people who believe in Jesus on account of the disciples will continue to believe in Jesus, and they will teach others, and so on. Jesus’ fruit remains, even to this day. And Jesus saves us to make us fruitful. As we build relationships, and speak truth from the word, people come to know Jesus. And they become like Jesus.

Jesus wants to make disciples. That’s why he saved us; to be a people who draws the world to him; who seeks the world for him; who speaks to the world about him. And the only

question left to ask is, *“Do I believe this?” “Do I believe that Jesus is willing and able to do this through me?”* Often, when we talk about *“making disciples,”* people think, *“I’m not ready to teach people about Jesus. I need more training.”* And yes, training is important. It’s helpful. But our greatest barrier to making disciples isn’t a lack of competence. It’s a lack of confidence; a lack of confidence in Christ, and his redemptive purpose for my life. And I can say this from personal experience; because if anyone has been trained to make disciples, it’s me. And that’s not a boast. It’s a lament. I’ve received so much training, and I’ve applied so little of it. My mom and dad have taught me the Bible constantly; basically from birth until now. I had excellent mentors throughout Middle School and High School and College. I have friends and peers who are great disciple-makers. I studied the Bible academically for 6 years. I’ve had countless conversations with pastors, and leaders, and PhD’s in Old Testament and New Testament. I’ve read more books, and attended more conferences and seminars than I can remember. And I’m currently coached by one of the best Christian leadership development gurus in North America. And yet, to this day, when I think about sharing my faith, or developing a plan to disciple someone, I think, *“oh man, what am I going to do? I better go read a book, and find out how to do this.”* That’s crazy, right? Here’s the point; we will never feel competent, because the task is too daunting. In ourselves, we are not sufficient. We need to be confident that Jesus really does want to work through us. And discipleship is scary. But it’s also pretty simple. As my friend Justin says, discipleship is just God’s truth transferred through a loving relationship.<sup>14</sup> That’s it. You don’t have to be a scholar. You just have to share what Jesus is teaching you with someone else. That’s it.

I truly believe that joy in life comes from doing what you’ve been designed to do. Steph Curry was made to be a great shooter. I was made to sit on a coach, and watch Steph shoot. And as Christians we are re-made in Christ to make disciples; to teach others about him. That’s God’s redemptive purpose. And if we can trust Jesus to save us from sin; we can trust him to save us for this purpose in the world, and experience the abundant life he has for us. Let’s pray.

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<sup>1</sup> Matthew 28:19.

<sup>2</sup> Matthew 16:18.

<sup>3</sup> Genesis 12:2-3.

<sup>4</sup> Exodus 19:6.

<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 7:6.

<sup>6</sup> Leviticus 20:26.

<sup>7</sup> *Total Church: A Radical Reshaping around Gospel and Community* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2008); 39.

<sup>8</sup> *Love in Hard Places* (Wheaton, Ill: Crossway, 2002); 61.



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<sup>9</sup> Ephesians 3:10.

<sup>10</sup> 1 John 3:9.

<sup>11</sup> 1 Peter 2:11.

<sup>12</sup> Matthew 10:16-20.

<sup>13</sup> Phrase taken from *Total Church*, 64.

<sup>14</sup> See <http://www.gardencitysv.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/01/Discipleship-Framework-2015.pdf>