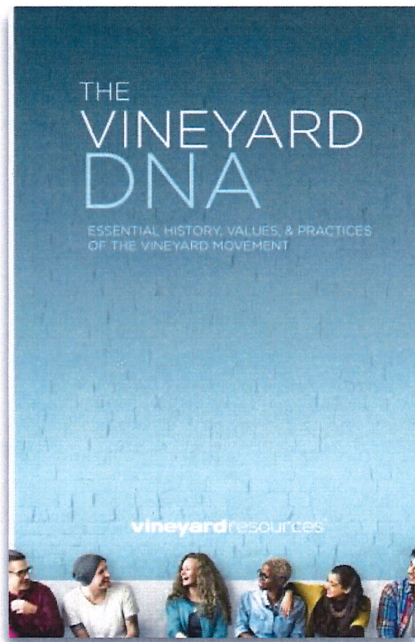


EXCERPT



EVERYONE GETS TO PLAY

From *The Vineyard DNA*, p. 53-67

CHAPTER 3 EVERYONE GETS TO PLAY

Theology of the Kingdom of God taught by Jesus seems to welcome every Christian into a vital way of living that is characterized by a full participation in the work the Father is doing! And the best part is that God plays no favorites – every person, no matter who they are, what age they are, or where they are from – gets to join in the fun.

Believing & Doing

Is being a Christian about believing the right things, or living a new way?

One of the weaknesses of the Church in the 20th century was the direct result of what scholars call *modernism*. Modernism was based on the idea that if we just gave people the right ideas, the right knowledge, they would then have happy and satisfied lives.

In the 21st century, we are coming to terms with the emptiness of this argument. Simply having intellectual knowledge does not lead people to live meaningful, satisfying lives.

John Wimber, the spiritual father of the Vineyard Movement, intuitively understood that much of the Church had given in to this error of modernism. That is, they were more concerned with telling people what to *believe* than showing them how to *live*.

There's a famous anecdote about Wimber going to church for the first time after coming to faith in his friend's living room. After a fairly dry sermon and singing time, he asked his friend, "When do we get to do the stuff? The stuff in that book? I gave up drugs for this?"

This intuition goes to the heart of one of the most important distinctives of the Vineyard: that we are a movement of people who want to learn to live like Jesus lived, not simply believe what Jesus believed. And we don't want this limited to the professional clergy — we believe that anyone can learn to live the kind of life that Jesus did.

The phrase that has come to embody this value in the Vineyard is the phrase *everyone gets to play* — which is another way of saying that the Holy Spirit can empower *anyone* to do what Jesus did.

WHAT DID JESUS DO?

Jesus' Way Of Leading

The life of Jesus of Nazareth is recorded in the four canonical books we call the Gospels. Each tells the story from a different angle, and the books fit together to paint a striking image of the man Christians

believe was simultaneously human and divine. Thus there are aspects of His life that we can never emulate — His moral perfection, His perfectly clear wisdom, His redemptive death. And there are also aspects of His life that, through the empowerment of the Spirit, we can seek to emulate. So, focusing on those parts of His life we can pursue ... what did Jesus do?

First of all, Jesus welcomed. His welcome was as broad as the people He encountered. He was not a power broker; He was not strategically (or cynically) "networking" so as to maximize His potential influence. He did not see any one person as more righteous or valuable than another. Rather, Jesus' welcome was total. He hung out with people, especially with the marginalized. He loved to be with the poor and the outsiders. He liked to be with prostitutes and drinkers, doubters and thieves. These people found in Jesus someone who saw past their flaws to their inner person — the core part that the God whom Jesus called Father had created in His own image.

Second, Jesus healed. He healed the sick in every way imaginable. He brought sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, life to the dead. He made people walk again, speak again, feel again. And He brought spiritual healing. To those oppressed by evil spirits, to those who were manic or depressed, to those whose inner demons had led them to isolation and alienation, He brought remarkable freedom. There is scarcely any clearer New Testament witness to any other aspect about Jesus than that He was a *healer*.

Third, Jesus summoned. His call was for people to repent and to follow Him. He welcomed and healed anyone, but He did not invite them to stay in their painful lives — He called them to change. He gave them hope that there was a different way of life available. He taught them what spiritual power without religious oppression

looked like. He showed people what it meant to be convicted by God without feeling condemned. Jesus was remarkable in His spiritual genius, which could draw people to transformation without Him having to exert pressure or power.

Fourth, Jesus commissioned. The Gospels are replete with language about how Jesus' ministry, while in some ways utterly unique, was in other ways definitively intended to be *imitated*. His final words in the gospel of Matthew were "Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you" (Matt. 28:19). This was not a religion for a single cultural moment.

Rather, Jesus intended to launch a global movement of the Kingdom of God – bringing life and hope to all people.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Rick & Becky Olmstead

"When we say 'everyone gets to play' we sometimes overlook youth, and we usually aren't referring to the kids in our churches. At best, we let them be spectators as we participate in the ministry of Jesus. But, Jesus told us, 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the Kingdom of God belongs to such as these' (Mark 10:14b).

Is it possible for a child to be used by God to deliver a prophetic word? I heard of an instance just recently where a child told her mother, 'One, two, three, four... that's how many there are of us. But one is missing. He'll be here soon.' She was telling her mom that their family wasn't complete.

They would have one more brother. Within two years that brother was born.

Could a child speak a word of wisdom to an adult? A single mom who had angry blowouts with her children came to see me one day because her three-year-old daughter told her the night before, following an emotional outbreak, 'Mommy, Jesus doesn't like it when you treat us that way. Ask Him and He will help you change.'

Could a child's prayer bring healing? A four-year-old child prayed 'Jesus heal cancer' for a woman diagnosed with breast cancer. After a trip back to the doctor she learned that she no longer had a cancerous mass in her breast.

What if a child started a 'God talk' with his or her friends? Several kids from our church have. They have shared Jesus with their friends on the playground at school. One of our teenagers started a 'God talk' with a homeless man one very cold winter night. He ended up buying that man dinner, bringing him into his warm truck and praying for his foot condition, and then, rather than turning him out to sleep in the cold, he took the man home for the night. (The next morning his parents were very surprised.) Now that sounds like something Jesus would do!

We know that the Holy Spirit has distributed His gifts to all believers. Does it matter that a significant portion of believers are kids and teens? After all, one out of every four people in the world today is 14 or under. Could we be missing out on 25% of the ways God would like to see His Kingdom advance because we have overlooked including a whole population of youth when we say that 'everyone gets to play?'"

WHO DID JESUS COMMISSION TO DO KINGDOM WORK?

Jesus Taught A Way Of Life To His Disciples

The ability to do what Jesus did was never something that happened to people in some kind of instant spiritual download. Jesus taught a way of life, of intimacy with the Father and empowerment by the Spirit, that issued out into Kingdom living and could be passed on to the next generation.

Jesus had three close friends named Peter, James, and John. They spent more time with Him than anyone else did, and they all played significant roles of leadership in the early days of the Church. Then Jesus had another wider circle of 12 friends, including the first three, that have been known as *disciples* or *apostles*. He often withdrew from public ministry to spend time teaching, mentoring, and developing these leaders. They were a motley group from various walks of life and social spaces.

Extending The Ministry Of Jesus

Jesus' commissioning was not limited to His closest three friends, or only to the disciples. Some biblical passages talk about a group of 72 people that He commissioned and empowered to be ministers of the Kingdom. Other passages mention larger groups of "followers" who also seem to have been commissioned not only to experience the ministry of the Kingdom, but also to extend this ministry.

After the death and resurrection of Jesus, we are told a group of 120 believers obeyed Jesus' instructions to wait for the Holy Spirit to empower them for further ministry. The remainder of the New Testament makes it clear that very quickly, thousands more were commissioned with the power of the Spirit. Jesus had promised this

would happen: "You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you. And you will be my witnesses, telling people about me everywhere – in Jerusalem, throughout Judea, in Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

On the day of Pentecost, thousands were baptized into the ministry of Jesus. Churches began springing up all over the Roman empire – in Ephesus, Colossae, Antioch, and even the imperial capital of Rome. Among Jews and Gentiles, men and women, poor and rich, educated and uneducated, people came to faith in Christ and discovered through the Holy Spirit the empowerment to do the same Kingdom works as Jesus.

The Church Is Not Always Perfect

2,000 years later, we have a rich record of how the Church has expanded all over the globe through everyday people being empowered to extend the Kingdom of God. Of course, it hasn't always been pretty. Jesus promised that one day He would return and bring the Kingdom in all its fullness.

Until that day, we experience the Kingdom of God as an *already and not yet* reality.

We have stories of God using His people to bring healing, salvation, and hope down through the generations. We also have stories of the Church being corrupt and hijacked by the powers of the day. People of faith mourn the *not yet* moments of the Kingdom, but believe that God still has hope for the Church to be the community of power and love Jesus meant for it to be.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Christian Dunn

“Wouldn’t it be weird if we went to a high school football game, and instead of student athletes playing, only the coaching staff played while the students watched from the sideline? Every game, the coaches would sit the students down and say, ‘Watch us! This is how you do it. And when you get older you can try it too, but not now. But trust us, it’s awesome!’

A renewed emphasis on creating opportunities for teens and young adults to ‘get to play’ has been moving through the Vineyard. I believe this is absolutely crucial for the future of the Vineyard. And it is a strong focus in my own heart.

Working alongside teens and young adults has been incredibly gratifying for me. I find that they are a deep well of energy, talent, giftedness, vision, honesty, and creativity. I believe the time is now to harness this amazing resource that God has given to our movement!

But, it isn’t going to happen magically. We adults need to proactively plan for and create meaningful ministry opportunities for our young people.

Why is this so important? Here are a few reasons I’d like to suggest:

1. Teens and young adults need their own ‘God stories.’

As adults we know the impact our God stories have had on our lives. The question is – are we creating space for teens and young adults in the Vineyard to have their own experiences in ministry?

2. Tangible lessons last!

I don’t remember many of the Bible studies I attended as a teen, but I do have vivid memories of the times where I prayed for people, saw healings, and shared my faith!

3. Our churches need young people in ministry now!

We simply can’t wait. What they have to offer now will greatly benefit you, your church, and the community your church is reaching. Plus, they probably won’t be around in 10 years if we don’t give them a place now!

How can we make this shift? To start, teens and young adults should be trained, equipped, and released to minister in our churches much like adults are. We should have qualified teens on our worship teams, doing prayer ministry, praying for the sick, running service projects and outreaches, leading small groups, praying prophetically, speaking in front of the church, working behind the scenes administratively, and more!

The awesome piece is that this isn’t a ‘replacement’ of adults. It is a partnership. I love to see adults and teens working together. There is so much value in adults sowing into the lives of young people. And, honestly, there is a ton of blessing for adults working with young people too.

So I encourage you! Ask the Lord how you and your church can create meaningful space for your young people. Let’s welcome teens into the adventure of living naturally supernatural lives. Let’s encourage them to experience the power and presence of God. Let’s create space for them to play too!”

WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME?**You Get To Play**

Jesus commissions anyone who wants commissioning. His Kingdom ministry is for everyone; there are no disqualifications. Regardless of your personality, your history, or your gifting, Jesus wants to involve you in His plan for the world.

A group of teenagers and early 20-somethings gathered in a living room, led by a not-much-older couple in the late 1990s in suburban Chicago. Most of them had some kind of faith background but found themselves jaded and skeptical about religion.

But over the weeks, the wife of the not-much-older couple would play her guitar and sing simple songs of love to Jesus. The husband would teach simple, helpful truths from Scripture. And then they would take time to lay hands on each other and pray for the presence of the Spirit.

Person after person in that group would find themselves unexpectedly touched by the presence of God. Sometimes a sickness would be healed, but most often, they would simply find hardness in their hearts softened into love for Jesus. They often found themselves emboldened to do ministry.

Some would head to the mall to share Christ. Some felt called to overseas ministry. Some of them became lay leaders in local churches, leading small groups that cared deeply about reaching those around them. Others became pastors or missionaries or leaders of faith communities on college campuses.

People Empowered By The Spirit

This pattern repeats itself again and again throughout the Vineyard, and we believe it is simply a continuation of what Jesus was doing with His three close friends, His twelve disciples, and many beyond that. This is why it's impossible to stop the movement of Jesus through persecution, political oppression, or legal action.

The movement of Jesus does not depend on institutional support – it happens organically through people empowering other people in the power of the Holy Spirit in the same way they themselves were empowered.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Rose Swetman

"From the little boy who shared his lunch that fed over 5000 people, to the woman at the well whose story impacted an entire village, to a young Jewish girl in first century Palestine who said 'yes' to God and gave birth to Jesus, we know it's true: 'everyone gets to play.'"

When we read through the pages of Scripture, we learn quickly that God's story unfolds throughout human history and is on a trajectory that has a goal: the redemption of the heavens and earth. Within the story, we see over and over again how God invites, commissions, and empowers broken humanity to join with Him in bringing forth His eternal purposes.

Some time ago several of our young people spent a weekend at an event called, 'City Serve.' They joined with hundreds of young people around the city and served in homeless teen shelters, gardening in community gardens, and the like. They prayed together, worshipped together, and

had an amazing time playing in God's Kingdom.

Another time I had a conversation with an 80-something-year-old woman in our church that listens to so many folks within and beyond our church, and very often in her listening, God sends the one she is listening to a 'gracelet' specifically created for that occasion. I could tell you countless stories of people from every life stage that are participating in God's Kingdom work as they go about their everyday lives. Whether it is feeding hungry people, praying for the sick, or working in a community garden, everyone has something to bring to God's table that will be food for another's life.

Our worship gatherings are times where we can look for ways to create space for God to send His gracelets through and to His people, by encouraging young and old alike to listen to the Spirit of God and to be postured openly to be conduits of his gracelets. Training all ages how to minister with grace, love, and wisdom is a regular way of fostering a culture that brings heaven to earth. Some have said that the practices of the Vineyard are more 'caught than taught.' Creating spaces for people of all ages to continue the ministry of Jesus is how the church of today continues being a vibrant church for tomorrow.

During one of our Northwest region's biannual conferences, our tagline was 'every1 gets2play.' From the youngest child to the elders among us, everyone had an opportunity to play: children praying for people of all ages, youth serving in a variety of ways throughout the conference, and adults teaching, praying, and singing.

It is a beautiful picture of God's people when we actively pursue folks in all walks of life to deliver His gracelets and use their talents for the sake of the church and the world."

EVERYONE GETS IN ON THE PARTY

So, how can you experience commissioning from Jesus? It's really worth the effort. No two people experience this commissioning in the same way. Jesus is our creator and knows our hearts better than anyone else. He formed us with a particular destiny: to carry on the work of His Kingdom in the midst of a complicated, difficult world.

Here are three steps to start on this journey:

First, look for some people who are experiencing Jesus' call in a way that is compelling to you. Go be around them. Watch how they live. They'll never be perfect (remember the "already-not yet" concept?). Don't let their imperfections disillusion you. But when they are at their best, pay attention. Ask questions.

Second, ask for them to show you how to "do the stuff." Ask to pray for the sick with them. Ask to serve alongside them in church or in the community. Ask if you can try leading for a week in the group they are heading up. You'll find that Jesus' people are typically pretty enthusiastic to show others how to do what they're doing. If you pursue some who aren't, move on until you find some who really want to include you.

Third, be ready to give it all away. It's surprising how quickly Jesus can turn us from trainees into trainers. Be on the lookout for people you can help grow into the destiny that Jesus has for them. You'll be amazed at how ready God is to empower the next group of people to do His Kingdom ministry.

Don't expect your Jesus-ministry to look like anyone else's. Everyone

gets to play, and we all have a different part. We all have vocations, or callings, that are meaningful to God and reveal His heart to the world in a special way. Whether we join God's Kingdom work in our workplaces or neighborhoods, we can engage with what God is doing in those unique environments. The beauty of the Kingdom is that everyone has their own roles, and it can all come together to reveal the beauty of what God is doing in the world – and what He will one day bring to completion.

A PERSONAL REFLECTION

Jay Pathak

"Have you ever wanted to be a super hero? Flying through the sky, wind blowing in your hair, bending steel bars in your hands – admired by everyone and feared by your enemies? Maybe you weren't into comic book characters. Maybe rock musicians are your cup of tea. Or the walls of your room were covered with sports heroes. We all have someone that we look up to and admire. We admire them because we believe that they are different than us, and with some of our heroes, they seem unreachable.

In churches that believe in the power and the presence of the Holy Spirit, and want to see the kinds of miracles we see Jesus and the apostles doing, we create a whole different kind of superhero. We stand in rapt awe watching the 'man of God' on the platform delivering prophetic words proclaiming healing into the microphone. They exude such confidence and charisma, they seem far removed from the petty doubts and fears that normal people experience. They have stories that amaze and power that is obviously from God himself.

Just like the gifted athletes we watch on television, we begin to watch these leaders with awe and admiration. The more we watch them, the more convinced we are of their other-worldliness. We are more convinced with every moment that what they do they do easily – and we should never even attempt to try.

This is where I think the Vineyard has shown another way. The phrase that John Wimber was known to say often was 'everyone gets to play.' His goal was to create opportunities for normal people to do extraordinary things. The action wasn't always on the stage, but all around the room. In those Vineyard meetings he would give opportunities for people to learn how to pray for one another and begin discerning how to hear God's voice.

As that practice built confidence, faith would spill out of the room, traveling everywhere those people went. The goal of the Vineyard has always been to 'equip the saints for the work of ministry' (Eph. 4:12a). To train ordinary people to do extraordinary things – that has always been the idea behind the calling of the Vineyard movement in the world.

That sense of confidence and faith must have been the same feeling that the 72 felt after being sent out by Jesus (Lk. 10). These ordinary men and women came back amazed at what God had done through them. They couldn't believe that it worked. The sick were healed, and even the demons submitted when they prayed in Jesus' name. And Jesus' response to their excitement? Joy. Pure joy.

I bet He still feels the same way. He loves watching normal people do extraordinary things in the power of His name. Everyone gets to play."

THE VINEYARD DNA

ESSENTIAL HISTORY, VALUES, & PRACTICES
OF THE VINEYARD MOVEMENT

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