

Acts 8:26–40
Ps. 22:25–31
1 John 4:7–21
John 15:1–8

Vine and Branches

Goal for the Session

As they learn that Jesus is the vine and they are the branches, children will rejoice and find strength for serving together.

■ PREPARING FOR THE SESSION

Focus on John 15:1–8

WHAT is important to know?

— From “Exegetical Perspective,” Sarah S. Henrich

All the language of this passage turns on the image of Jesus as the vine. He twice declares this of himself (vv. 1, 5), in each case developing the image in a different direction. Bearing fruit is a phrase also repeated in verses 2 (three times), 4, 5, and 8. How does Jesus as the vine connect with the disciples’ bearing of much fruit? The relationship is one of mutual abiding. A third cluster of repeated terms has to do with abiding or remaining (*menein*): there are seven occurrences of this verb in these verses. It is the interconnection of these images that Jesus presses.

WHERE is God in these words?

— From “Theological Perspective,” Stephen A. Cooper

Jesus’ parable, however, through its imagery suggests a living and growing community of faith, a site of productivity and increase. Based on its presence on the vine, each branch is to recognize its part in the whole and do its part. That part involves the production of fruits, or goods, which accrue not to the private good of the individual but to the good of the whole. Or, to extend the logic of the simile, these fruits accrue to the farmer: they are God’s goods, with a view to which God planted and tended the vine. Thus the passage is ultimately about divine providence and the goodness of creation when it acknowledges its dependence on the Creator.

SO WHAT does this mean for our lives?

— From “Pastoral Perspective,” Nancy R. Blakely

As Jesus counsels and prays with his disciples, he invites them to stay close to him by placing their trust in him. He warns them that they cannot go it alone, trusting in their own strength. On their own they would be cut off from their life source. The temptation to go it on our own is great. We live in a society that promotes independence and making something of yourself. Though a valid goal, self-worth often becomes equated with our own success and what we can produce. It becomes very easy to think that it is all up to us and our own resources as we try to solve problems and meet challenges.

NOW WHAT is God’s word calling us to do?

— From “Homiletical Perspective,” Barbara J. Essex

The community that Jesus calls forth is one that embodies an African proverb: *Because we are, I am*. The branches that do not yield fruit are the ones in the community who profess faith but do not engage in acts of love. This does not mean that one can *earn* salvation; rather, those who see and hear Jesus are moved to respond to the gift of salvation through their own acts of love. In other words, a sign of discipleship is doing good works for the right reasons.

FOCUS SCRIPTURE

John 15:1–8

Focus on Your Teaching

In many communities, it's time to plant seeds and watch them grow. Children see plants for sale at many stores. Some are helping their families to plant gardens or window boxes. Some are watching tractors pull planters across broad fields. And children this age are studying plants in school. Today children will hear that they are strongest when they are connected to Jesus. Their faith will grow when they rely on Jesus, just as branches rely on the vine for nourishment. Help them explore the importance of being connected to Jesus. Marvel at how they are beginning to plant their lives in Jesus.

Holy Gardener, lead me to grow in Christ. Keep me ever connected to you. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- small table or large box
- white cloth
- cross
- Bible
- 3 paper grocery bags
- scissors
- green paper
- masking tape
- markers
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pencils
- Color Pack 16, 17, 30

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2; scissors; Internet-connected device (optional)
- option 2: map or globe, Internet-connected device
- option 3: paper cups, potting soil, spoon, green bean seeds, spray bottle, water, plastic wrap, rubber bands

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, cut the bottom from each paper grocery bag, cut along one side, and flatten it into a long piece; cut the flattened bags into long strips, about 4" wide. Cut large leaves with 3" stems from green paper, three per child. Make a worship table by covering a small table or large box with a white cloth and placing a cross on it. If you are using option 1 in Responding, cut the square from Resource Sheet 2 (Vine and Fruit Origami) for each child. If you are using option 2, bring information about missionaries or international aid projects your church supports.

Welcome each child by name. Invite them to help you make a vine. Have them twist the long strips cut from the paper bag into "vines." Use masking tape to connect the ends of the strips to make one long vine. Give each child three paper leaves. Ask learners to use markers to write their own names on one leaf and then the names of family members or friends on the other leaves. Have them use masking tape to attach the stems of the leaves to the paper vine. Wind your vine around the base of your worship table or around a door or window.

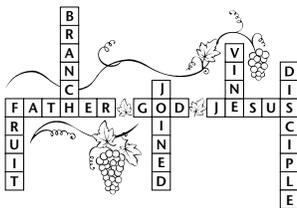
Gather with learners around the worship table. Comment on how many people are connected to your vine. Say today's Bible reading is about a vine. Pray aloud, inviting learners to repeat each phrase:

Dear Jesus, / be with us as we learn about you. / Help us to learn / how God connects us in love. Amen.

EXPLORING

Gather with learners in a circle. Open your Bible to John 15 and tell learners this is where today's Bible story is found. Explain that you will read the story together. Give Color Pack 16 to a child. Have him or her read the words in red. (Read in unison with learners who are not confident readers.) When he or she comes to the words in blue, the person to the child's right will join in reading these words in blue. Then pass Color Pack 16 to this child to read the next words in red. Continue in this way until the story is finished. Repeat as needed so everyone has a turn. Discuss:

- ✿ If a branch is connected to a vine, what can it produce?
- ✿ What happens to a branch that is not connected to a vine?
- ✿ Why do you think Jesus says he is "the vine"? What might it mean for you to be one of Jesus' branches?



To review the story, distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Crossword) and pencils. Read the directions aloud. Read the word list in unison and invite learners to work individually to fill in the crossword. Help as needed. After all have finished, ask volunteers to tell what they remember about each of the words from today's reading.

Show Color Pack 17. Invite learners to point to places on the picture where branches are connected to the vine. Review that the branches have to be connected to the main vine to grow fruit. Say that even though this fruit looks good to eat, when Jesus says we are to "produce fruit," he didn't mean that every one of us would be a gardener or farmer who grows fruit.

- ✿ What do you think Jesus means when he says we will "produce fruit"? (Accept a variety of responses, such as working together to help others, tell others about Jesus, invite others to learn about Jesus, be loving and caring.)

EASY
PREP

Option: To see a video of how to fold this origami project, go to: www.origami-fun.com/origami-monkey-and-the-mountain.html.

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Growing in Jesus** Children will tell others about producing fruit in Jesus using an origami project. Give each child a square cut from Resource Sheet 2 (Vine and Fruit Origami). Demonstrate each step of the directions on the resource sheet, pausing for learners to do the step. Demonstrate how to use the finished origami to tell about Jesus, the vine: As we grow and grow with Jesus (move the two tails of the origami up and down), we produce good fruit (pop the small triangle out of the top) by doing good things for others. Have learners practice this story, and encourage them to tell it to someone at home.

- 2. Worldwide Vine** Children will broaden their view about being connected to the vine of disciples. Show the map or globe. Remark that Jesus connects Christians all over the world to serve others, just like a vine. If your congregation supports a missionary or international aid project, tell about it and point out the location of this serving. Invite learners to point to countries that they know. Affirm that Christians in these places are connected to Jesus, just like they are. Say you can rejoice in this good news as you do a vine dance from Romania. Follow the instructions for the dance at: www.peuniverse.com/videos/detail.cfm?post_id=1041.
- 3. Rooted in Christ** Children will start take-home plants to remind them to pray for strength. Give each child a paper cup (5 oz. or 7 oz. will work well), saying this is a temporary home for their plants. Lead learners in the following steps: Add potting soil until the cup is about half full. Place two green bean seeds on top of the soil. Cover the seeds with an additional inch of potting soil. Lightly spray the soil with water. Cover cup with plastic wrap, secured by a rubber band around the cup. Teach the following prayer: “Jesus, our vine, keep us strong for life.” Encourage learners to put their cups in a warm, sunny place at home, leaving the plastic in place until the seeds sprout. After seeds sprout, they should remove the plastic and mist the sprouts with water each day, praying each time they water. Once the sprouts have two sets of leaves, they can be planted outdoors in a container or garden.

CLOSING

I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy

I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy
down in my heart,
Down in my heart, down in
my heart;
I’ve got the joy, joy, joy, joy
down in my heart,
Down in my heart to stay.

God is with us, God is with
us, praise ye the Lord;
Praise ye the Lord, praise ye
the Lord.
God is with us, God is with
us, praise ye the Lord;
Praise ye the Lord always.

Gather with learners around the worship table and the vine. Exclaim that it’s exciting to know we are all connected to Jesus, who is our vine and brings us life and joy. Rejoice together by singing. Invite learners to hold hands to create a “vine line.” Lead them around the room as everyone sings “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy” (Color Pack 30; track 12 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021). Go around tables and chairs, ending up back at the worship table.

Explain that you will begin a prayer and pause for children to name the people named on the vine leaves. Pray aloud:

Dear Lord, you are the vine and we are the branches. Be with all who are joined to you: (children will speak the names from leaves). Help us to bear fruit by serving. Help us to be your disciples. Help us to show your love. Amen.

Vine and Fruit Origami

Directions: (To see a video of how to fold this origami project,

go to: www.origami-fun.com/origami-monkey-and-the-mountain.html.)

1. Fold square in half and unfold, and then fold it in half the other direction and unfold.
2. Fold in half, diagonally. Unfold. Using this crease, bring the two opposite corners together, folding them inside to make a square.
3. Use scissors to cut a small triangle “fruit” off the top of this small square.
4. Fold up the top sheet from the corner opposite the cut corner, making a triangle.
5. Turn the square over. Fold up the top sheet from the corner opposite the cut corner, making a triangle.
6. Place the “fruit” inside this folded triangle, so it’s hidden.
7. To make the vine bear fruit, move the two triangle “tails” up and down, keeping them close together.
8. Watch the top of the vine, and soon it will bear fruit!

