

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

Fruit on the Vine

Goal for the Session

Tweens will engage Jesus' teaching about the vine and explore ways to contribute to the living, growing community of faith.

■ 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

Most tweens seek to belong to groups that make them feel cared for, included, and important. Some groups restrict who can belong based on certain abilities or popularity. Belonging to the community of faith, however, is open to all. Welcome tweens to your church and let them know they are valued. Find ways to include them in the programs and ministries of the church. Affirm that they are disciples who can make valuable contributions to the life of the community.

Holy God, surround me with your gracious and loving presence. Help me to show these young disciples how much I value their presence in our church. I pray in the name of the true vine, Jesus the Christ. Amen.

YOU WILL NEED

- white cloth
- gold or yellow streamers or ribbons
- Christ candle, matches
- live plant
- Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021; CD player
- copies of Resource Sheet 1
- pencils
- Color Pak 18, 19, 30, 33
- fine-tipped permanent markers
- grapes or raisins
- napkins

For Responding

- option 1: copies of Resource Sheet 2
- option 2: vinelike plant, paper cups, scissors, water, 3" clay or plastic pots, permanent markers, potting soil, zip-seal sandwich bags, spoon, paper towels
- option 3: Color Pak 19, string of holiday lights, construction paper, scissors, markers, hole punch, yarn

LEADING THE SESSION

GATHERING

Before the session, if you are using the option in Exploring, invite a gardener to talk about growing vines. If you are using option 2 in Responding, bring a large philodendron, ivy, or tradescantia plant to take cuttings from.

Greet tweens as they arrive. Ask volunteers to spread the white cloth in the center of your meeting space, arrange gold or yellow streamers or ribbons on it, and place the Christ candle and the plant on it. Gather the group around the Christ candle and light it. Announce that this is the fifth Sunday of the Easter season. Sing “Alleluia! Alleluia!” (Color Pak 33; track 1 on *Singing the Feast*, 2020–2021).

Review the “All” response, and then lead the following litany:

Leader: Jesus Christ was dead, but he now lives forever and ever!

All: Christ is risen indeed!

Leader: Because Jesus lives, we also will live abundantly and eternally!

All: Christ is risen indeed!

Leader: Come, Lord Jesus, and keep us connected to you.

All: Christ is risen indeed!

Extinguish the candle.

Point to the live plant and invite learners to tell about their experiences with growing plants, indoors or outdoors. Touch one of the leaves as you ask:

✠ If I pulled off this leaf, what would happen to it? What would happen to the plant?

Say that today’s Bible reading is about a plant.

Alleluia! Allelu!

Alleluia! Allelu! Jesus has
been raised!
Alleluia! Allelu! Let his
name be praised!
The angel at the break of
day
Rolled the giant stone away.
Alleluia! Allelu! Jesus has
been raised!

Some examples of
“producing fruit”:
donating food to a
food pantry; being
kind to a stranger;
comforting a child
who is hurt or scared;
listening to a friend;
worshiping; praying;
visiting someone who
is lonely; gathering
supplies for a mission
project; contributing
to an organization
that helps people who
are homeless; inviting
friends to church
activities; helping with
household chores
without being asked.

EASY
PREP

EXPLORING

Show Color Pack 18 and invite learners to tell what they know about grapevines. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 1 (Jesus, the True Vine) and ask a volunteer to read aloud the “Background” section. Ask volunteers to use a fine-tipped permanent marker to label the parts of the grape plant on the poster. Option: Ask a gardener to talk with the group about caring for grapevines.

Say that today’s Bible reading is found in the Gospel of John. Review that the Gospels are the New Testament books that tell about Jesus’ life and teachings. In this passage, Jesus is speaking to the disciples on the night before his crucifixion.

Ask two volunteers to read aloud John 15:1–8 from the resource sheet, each one reading one section. Discuss:

- ✂ Who is the vineyard keeper?
- ✂ What does the vineyard keeper do?
- ✂ Who is the vine?
- ✂ Who are the branches?
- ✂ What happens when people are separated from Jesus?
- ✂ When Jesus says “produce much fruit,” what is he talking about?
- ✂ Why do you think Jesus said these things to his followers on the night before his death? What did he want them to do?

Have each learner to choose a favorite phrase or sentence from the Bible passage and print it in the leaves at the bottom of the page, one word per leaf. Invite tweens to tell one another about the words they chose.

Place Color Pack 19 in the center of the group. Wonder together about the meaning of the words on the poster. Ask:

- ✂ What kinds of things might Christians do to “produce much fruit”? (Keep asking “what else” to generate a variety of ideas.)

Ask learners to take turns using fine-tipped permanent markers to write ways to “produce fruit” inside the grapes on the poster. Being mindful of allergies, offer grapes or raisins as a snack and ask a volunteer to say a prayer of thanks for food. As you eat, discuss:

- ✂ What examples of people “producing fruit” have you seen this week?
- ✂ How might doing things like this help to keep the church strong and growing?

RESPONDING

Mark the activities you will use:

1. **Creative Movement** Learners will create movements to express what it means to be part of the living, growing community of faith. Distribute copies of Resource Sheet 2 (Moving through John 15:1–8). Read the information together. Brainstorm responses to the questions after each line of the reading. Work as a group or form groups of three

or four to create a motion version of this reading. Plan to have one person reading aloud as the others interpret the words in motion. Option: Ask worship planners if learners might present this version of the Gospel reading in worship.

2. **Living Reminder** Learners will prepare a living reminder that they are part of the living church. Distribute 3" pots and permanent markers. Have each learner write a phrase or verse from John 15:1–8 on their pot and draw a vinelike design around the edges. Have each one use a spoon to fill a zip-seal sandwich bag with potting soil and close it. Distribute paper cups. Bring out the vinelike plant (such as philodendron, ivy, tradescantia) and cut off a section of the vine that has several leaves on it for each learner. Have learners wrap the end of the cutting in a paper towel, place it in the paper cup and soak it with water. Tell them to remove the paper towel at home and add water to the cup. Once they see several roots growing out the vine (in a couple of weeks), they can plant it in potting soil in their pot. Remind them to keep the soil moist, but not too wet, and soon new leaves and stems will appear. Discuss how these vines can be a reminder to stay connected to Jesus and the church.
3. **Light Vine** Learners will make a visual display to encourage other church members to contribute to the living community of faith. Look again at Color Pack 19 and review some of the ways to “produce fruit” as part of Jesus’ vine. Bring out the string of holiday lights and explain that the group will turn this into a grapevine. Set out construction paper, markers, and scissors. Have some learners draw and cut out large grape clusters and others draw and cut out large leaves, about twenty of each. Have learners work together to punch a hole in each leaf and tie it to the light string with yarn. Encourage each learner to write one example of “producing fruit” on a cluster of grapes, punch a hole in it, and tie it to the light string with yarn. Hang the light string where it can be plugged in for other church members to see. Option: Place extra grape clusters, markers, and yarn next to the display. Invite other church members to add their ideas about “producing fruit” to the vine.

**I’m Gonna Live
So God Can Use Me**

*I’m gonna live so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!*
*I’m gonna live so God can
use me
anywhere, Lord, anytime!*

*I’m gonna work so God can
use me . . .*

*I’m gonna share so God can
use me . . .*

*I’m gonna care so God can
use me . . .*

CLOSING

Gather with learners around the Christ candle and light it. Show Color Pack 19 and invite each person to say one way he or she will try to be a good “fruit of the Jesus vine” this week. Sing “I’m Gonna Live So God Can Use Me” (Color Pack 30; track 9 on *Singing the Feast, 2020–2021*).

Offer a call-and-response blessing. Begin by saying to the person on your right: “(Name), God has blessed you with abundant life.” The group responds: “(Name), remember you are connected to Jesus’ vine.” Repeat until each person has received the blessing.

Invite learners to exchange gestures and words of peace with one another.

Jesus, the True Vine

Background

Grapes were an important food crop in Jesus time, and grapevines were a common sight. The place where grapevines are grown is called a vineyard. The vine is the central part of the grape plant. The branches that support the leaves and grapes grow out from the vine. From time to time, the vineyard keeper removes branches that have stopped producing grapes. This is called pruning. Pruning makes the vine healthier and stronger.

John 15:1-8, CEB

[Jesus said,] ¹“I am the true vine, and my Father is the vineyard keeper. ²He removes any of my branches that don’t produce fruit, and he trims any branch that produces fruit so that it will produce even more fruit. ³You are already trimmed because of the word I have spoken to you. ⁴Remain in me, and I will remain in you. A branch can’t produce fruit by itself, but must remain in the vine. Likewise, you can’t produce fruit unless you remain in me.

⁵I am the vine; you are the branches. If you remain in me and I in you, then you will produce much fruit. Without me, you can’t do anything. ⁶If you don’t remain in me, you will be like a branch that is thrown out and dries up. Those branches are gathered up, thrown into a fire, and burned. ⁷If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask for whatever you want and it will be done for you. ⁸My Father is glorified when you produce much fruit and in this way prove that you are my disciples.



Moving through John 15:1–8

We can interpret what we read, think, or feel through motion. Read the following adaptation of John 15:1–8. Let the questions guide your own ideas for movements and gestures to interpret the Bible reading. Keep in mind the following types of movements: large and small; fast and slow; high and low; arms and legs; twisting and turning; loud or quiet.

Jesus said, “I am the true vine; you are the branches.”
(How can you show you are connected together through your faith in Jesus Christ?)

Any branches that don’t produce fruit will be removed.
(What prevents you from bearing good fruit for God? What can help you produce good fruit?)

Branches that do produce fruit will be trimmed so they can produce more.
(What is a good fruit in you that needs some help to grow better?)

We can’t produce good fruit in our lives if we don’t stay connected to Jesus!
(How do you stay attached to Jesus Christ?)

When we disconnect our lives from Jesus, we are like branches that are thrown out.
(Is this a big movement or a small one?)

When we produce good fruit, we are giving glory to God.
(What movements convey joy?)

Jesus said, “I am the true vine; you are the branches.”
(Will you create a new movement or repeat the first one?)

