



LESSON 3 FOR LEADERS

INVITATION

We invite you to pause, listen, and shift your gaze toward the Father ...

LESSON AT A GLANCE

WONDER TRUTH: Jesus Invites Us to Be Connected to Him

SCRIPTURE: John 15

WORD OF WONDER: From John 8:12

For the casual observer, soccer (aka football) can look like a bunch of players running around a field chasing a ball. If you watch young children play soccer, it looks like an adorable cluster with one or two kids chasing the ball while the rest follow in a clump.

However, as someone who played soccer, I can tell you that eventually you learn that each player on the field (pitch) has a specific job, and everyone relies on one another as a collective unit. No one can rely on their own skill and be successful in soccer. Like a vine with branches, our ability to bear fruit depends on each other's health and ability.

It is the coach's job to trim his team and cut off what isn't working to help the players bear more fruit together. The coach expects practice, and he will discipline players if it's necessary, requiring them to repeat (sometimes painful!) drills to break bad habits and develop correct technique.

Take a moment to read John 15:1–12. Jesus says to abide in Him as the vine. We are the branches, and much like soccer players, we need to trust and lean into our "coach's" leadership. How are you abiding in Jesus? In what areas are you learning to abide in Jesus?

If you and I are branches of Jesus, the vine, where have you seen Him trim you back to bring growth or fruit?

—Jeff Stone

Associate Pastor and Professional Counselor

Contributor to Wonder Ink

DID YOU KNOW?

FOUNDATION BUILDING BLOCKS

WHO?

As the true vine, Jesus is the source of life and power for godly living. The Father is the gardener who removes dead branches from the vine and prunes others that produce fruit. Jesus tells His disciples they are fruit-bearing branches who abide, or remain joined, to Jesus.

WHAT?

Jesus tells His disciples to abide in Him as He abides in them. The disciples are dependent on Jesus. They can do nothing apart from Him. Abiding in Jesus entails obeying His commands, especially the command to love one another. This produces God-glorifying fruit.

WHERE?

The events of John 14–17 take place in Jerusalem. By John 15, Jesus and His disciples had finished their last meal and were en route to the Garden of Gethsemane, which is east of the temple mount and across the Kidron Valley.

WHEN?

This passage comes just before Jesus is betrayed in the Garden of Gethsemane. His suffering and death are soon to follow. John 14–17 is sometimes called Jesus' farewell discourse.

CONNECTING TO GOD'S BIG STORY

All of Jesus' disciples have a part to play in God's big story: to bear the fruit of the kingdom and reveal God's glory to others. But this only happens through constant dependence on Jesus, the source of life who empowers us to love as He loves.



Curiosity

Belief

Faith

Identity

LESSON 3 EARLY CHILDHOOD

Play Stations

SUPPLIES: pipe cleaners (green and brown, at least 2 per kid), leaves, plants, coloring utensils

Greet the kids warmly and briefly explain the play stations to them. Invite them to play at any of the stations.

Welcome to church! While we're getting ready to start, you can play at any of these stations to help you get ready for our lesson today. Do you have any ideas about what we'll be learning today?

Play Station: Plants and Vines

Set-up: Set out fake or real leaves, plants, and green and brown pipe cleaners.

Play: Let the kids twist the pipe cleaners to make vines and branches. Allow them to play with the branches and vines and set them up in various formations as they pretend to work in their garden.



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LESSON 3 EARLY CHILDHOOD

Prayer of Invitation

Before entering into God's big story, lead kids in a prayer of invitation. Use the prayer here or your own words: **Jesus, thank You for inviting us to be connected to You. Help us remain as close to You as flowers and fruits are to their vines. We believe You are the true vine! We love and trust You. In Jesus' name, Amen.**

God's Big Story

Pull out the Bible

Ask: What is this called? The Bible

Ask: Why is the Bible special? Because it is God's word. Everything in it is true. It really happened.

Tell the Bible Story

Read the God's Big Story Script provided or read John 15:1–12 from the Bible.

GOD'S BIG STORY SCRIPT

SUPPLIES: Bible, bunch of grapes (real or fake), long rope

Ahead of time, print the Vineyard Sheet. Place the grapes, the rope, and the Vineyard Sheet where you can access them easily.

Jesus did lots of amazing things when He was on earth doing God's work. Jesus also told His followers, the disciples, many important things before it was time for Him to die on the cross. He told them that there is a place for them in God's family and that He is the way to God. Jesus first told them God would send the Holy Spirit as a forever friend to lead them and help them. And Jesus told them about vines and branches and how important it is to stay connected to God.

Hold up the Vineyard Sheet. **There are vines that grow fruit in places called vineyards. Gardeners take care of the vines and make sure they grow good fruit. Yum!**

God said that He had planted His people like a vine in the world (Psalm 80:8–16; Isaiah 5:1–7). God wanted them to follow Him so their lives would show good fruit like kindness and love.



But even though God loved and cared for His people, they did not always love God

back. The people produced bad fruit sometimes— things like being mean or jealous, or hating other people. They needed a better vine! “I am the true vine,” Jesus told His disciples. “My Father is the gardener” (John 15:1). Jesus was letting them know that life comes from Him.

But wait! If Jesus is the vine, then who are the branches? “I am the vine,” Jesus told His disciples again. “You are the branches” (John 15:5). Let’s take a look at a vine and its branches. Hold up the bunch of grapes. Point out the main vine and the branches that come off of it. **The branches connect to the vine and make fruit. In this case, grapes!**

Followers of Jesus get to be part of His work by growing good fruit in our hearts and then sharing it with the people around us. That good fruit is what happens in our lives when we become more like God and show His love. But no one can make good fruit on their own. They need Jesus! Jesus told His disciples to stay connected to Him and depend on Him for everything. Jesus said, “If you remain joined to me, and I to you, you will bear a lot of fruit. You can’t do anything without me” (John 15:5). Bring out a long rope. Jesus said that He is the vine, and we are the branches. **What do we need to do to stay healthy and produce good fruit?** Wait for answers. **That’s right! Stay connected to the vine – Jesus!**

Invite kids to stand up and hold onto the rope. **Stand up straight and tall! Show me what healthy branches look like.** Let kids demonstrate. **But show me what would happen to branches that aren’t attached to the vine!** Let them pretend to fall down—they may be dramatic and silly. That’s OK.

People who don’t stay connected to Jesus are like branches that get thrown away and dry up. Jesus doesn’t want His disciples to be like that. He wants them to always be connected to Him and grow good fruit! They show that they are Jesus’ disciples. They show how awesome God is! The disciples could show their love for Jesus by obeying His commands. He said, “If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love” (John 15:10). Jesus wasn’t trying to make life hard for them with silly rules. Jesus always knows what is best.

“Here is my command,” Jesus told them. “Love one another, just as I have loved you” (John 15:12). **Loving one another helps you stay connected to Jesus. And staying connected to Jesus is the best way to live. It’s how we fit into God’s big story. Jesus invites us to be connected to Him.**

Leader Tip: Jesus’ teaching in John 15 can confuse kids (and adults!). God doesn’t just grant every wish and desire like a genie. The reality is that God doesn’t always answer our prayers in the way we want or expect Him to. His good plans for us often look different from our own plans. But we can stay connected to Him through our prayers and trust in Him.

WORD OF WONDER

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world.”

— John 8:12

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **The places where vines grow and produce fruit are called what?** (*vineyards*)
2. **Branches that stay connected to their vines grow good fruit. For us to grow good fruit, who do we stay connected to?** (*Jesus*)
3. **What leads to full joy?** (*loving one another like Jesus*)
4. **When people aren’t connected to Jesus, what are some “fruits” that they grow?** (*being mean, jealous, hating other people, etc.*)
5. **What are some examples of good fruit we could grow?** (*kindness, love, becoming like God and showing His love, etc.*)
6. **How do we grow this good fruit?** (*by staying connected to Jesus*)
7. **What can you do to stay connected to Jesus?**
8. **How do we know when we are disconnected from Jesus?**

Jesus knows that we can’t grow good fruit, like loving others, without Him. He knows we depend on Him. This is why staying connected to Jesus is the best way to live. Let’s talk to God now in prayer!

Invite kids to share prayer requests and praises and to pray for each other. Some kids may not be comfortable praying out loud. That’s OK! Encourage them to pray silently and to thank God for inviting us to be connected to Him.



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LESSON 3 EARLY CHILDHOOD

Game: Fruit Balloons

SUPPLIES: balloons (8–10), 2 sheets of vine paper, markers, painter's tape

Inflate the balloons and scatter them around the room. Tape the 2 vine sheets to the wall or whiteboard to make one long vine.

Allergy Caution: Be aware of any latex allergies or sensitivities among your kids and volunteers before doing this activity!

Branches that stay connected to their vine produce good fruit. What happens to branches that disconnect from their vine? Allow answers. **That's right! When disconnected, branches drop their fruit, shrivel up, and die. The same is true for us when we are disconnected from the true vine, Jesus. That's not what we want! Our game will remind us of this truth today.**

Gesture to butcher paper on the wall. **Over here is our vine.** Point out the fruit balloons on the floor. **Scattered all over the floor is our fruit. When I say, "Go," each of you will find a fallen fruit and pick it up. When you pick it up, show me how someone might feel when they are disconnected from Jesus—sad, scared, mad, etc. I will give you a loop of tape to put on your fruit and tape it to the vine. When you tape your fruit to the vine, shout out something you might feel when you are connected to Jesus—happy, excited, peaceful, joyful. Ready, set, GO!**

Allow kids to play, picking up balloons and mimicking various emotions. Encourage them to tape the balloons onto the vine picture on the paper. Invite kids to come back together once all balloons are used.

Leader Tip: You can pre-tape loops onto the vine for faster gameplay.

Good job, everyone! I loved seeing all of your emotions. Remember, we are branches. And just like branches, we feel best when we are closest to the true vine, Jesus. Thank You, Jesus, for inviting us to be connected to You! You will use this vine again in Responding in Worship.