

GIMME GOD!

Church Service Packet

Vine

John 15:1-8
Matthew 7:15-23

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Welcome to the Gimme God! Worship Service. We have tried to make these resources as easy to use as possible. The sermons and prayers have been formatted with plenty of space to write in between the lines. Please feel free to make changes that will be most appropriate for your church.

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Sermon

The snow covered the ground where three lads were playing. A man came along and said to them, “Would you like to race? The winner will receive a prize.” The boys agreed, and the man told them that this race was going to be a little different than usual. “I will go to the other side of the field,” he said, “and when I give you the signal, you will start to run. The one whose footsteps are the straightest in the snow will be the winner.”

The race commenced, and the first boy kept looking at his feet to see if his steps were straight. The second lad kept looking at his companions to see what they were doing; but the third boy kept his eyes steadfastly fixed on the man on the other side of the field. Which of them do you think had the straightest footsteps?

Yes, the third lad was the winner, for his footsteps were straight in the snow. He had kept his eyes on the goal ahead of him.

When we talk about the Christian life, sometimes it's easy to put our eyes on something other than Christ. Sometimes we fall into the trap of looking at what others are doing, and it's even easier to fall into the bigger trap of constantly looking at ourselves. But both are distractions, and we see that in our reading from today. John 15:1-11 provides a microcosm of salvation and the Christian life, and in His analogy of the vine and the branches, Jesus reveals some very surprising facts about this life.

God Is The Only Vine

First, Christ says that God alone is the source. He is the only true vine, and in addition, He is the only one qualified to tend the vine. This means that our physical lives and our spiritual lives come only from Him. If we are connected to Him, then we are alive. Everything that is *not* connected to Him is dry, withered, and shriveled up.

In a way, God is like an electrical outlet. If we plug a lamp in to the outlet, it becomes connected with the source of power, and it can light up the whole room. But if the lamp is unplugged, it doesn't matter how hard it tries to light up the room, it will never happen. This is what Jesus meant in verse 5, when He said, "apart from me, you can't do anything." God is the source of *everything*. If we are plugged into Him, we have everything. If we are *not* plugged into Him, we have nothing.

God Nourishes The Vine

The second thing we see here is, since God is the only true vine and the only one qualified to tend the vine, He is the sole provider of nourishment and sustenance. When branches are connected to the vine, they flourish! They bear much fruit, and God the Gardener takes care of them in such a way that they continually produce *more* and *more* fruit. Here we see that—with God—life is abundant, and as time goes on, life with Him only gets *more* and *more* abundant. That means that, today,

if we are bearing beautiful fruit, we can expect and anticipate *more* and *better* fruit tomorrow. As we stay connected to Him, we can always expect more and more and more.

This brings us to the part that's hard for us to wrap our minds around sometimes. Because we can look at the example of the vine and the branches, and we can understand what God's role is. But what about us? What do we have to do? What's our part in all of this?

In this passage, Jesus was very clear about our role as branches in the Christian life. Our job is to remain, rest, and abide. That's it! Does it seem like there's something wrong with that? Doesn't it seem like there's something we should be *doing*? Some sort of *work* we should have to do?

Well, let's think about this for a moment. Who is the vine? God. Who tends the vine? God. Now, here's a tricky one. Who grows the fruit? The fruit appears on the branch, but does the branch work hard to *grow* the fruit? No. The fruit appears on the branch when it is connected to the vine. It's a totally natural process.

Sometimes it comes best from the mouth of babes: One day on their way home from church, a little girl turned to her mother and said, "Mommy, the preacher's sermon this morning confused me."

"Oh?" the mother said. "Why is that?"

The little girl replied, "Well, he said that God is bigger than we are. Is that true?"

The mother replied, “Yes, that’s true, honey.”

“And he also said that God lives in us? Is that true, Mommy?”

Again the mother replied, “Yes.”

“Well,” said the little girl, “if God is bigger than us and he lives in us, wouldn’t He show through?”

Forget About The Fruit

It seems simple when you put it like that. But sometimes, our tendency within Christianity is to try to determine whether we are bearing fruit, and if we think we’re not, we work hard to produce some. But Jesus warned us against this. He warned us that it is possible for us to *look* like we’re bearing fruit when—in fact—we are *not* connected to Him.

In Matthew, chapter 7, Jesus says,

Many will say to me on that day, “Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy
in your name, and in your name drive out demons and perform
many miracles?” Then I will tell them plainly, “I never knew you.
Away from me, you *evildoers!*”¹

These are people who will *look* like they are bearing fruit; they have prophesied in God's name, they have performed miracles, and they have even driven out demons! But Jesus reveals that it is not the *fruit* He is after, but the abiding, the relationship. In fact, He calls these people—who have done all these wonderful things—*evildoers*! And He has to say to them, “I’m sorry. We don’t have a relationship. We don’t know each other.”

So, as Christians, we need to *forget about the fruit*! Instead, we ought to focus on spending time with God, abiding with Him, remaining in the vine. This is our only “task” in the process of salvation: resting in God. Ironically, it was also our only “task” in the process of creation. Have you ever thought about that?

Creation was all God's idea, and it was all *His* work. And what was the very first thing God did after He created Adam and Eve? He created a day of *rest* for them—so they could spend time with Him. He wanted them to relax and spend time in His presence, getting to know Him, building a relationship with Him.

And it's the same way in the salvation process. Salvation was all God's idea, and it is all *His* work. The only thing we have to do is make a decision: are we going to abide with God or not? If we decide that we will abide with God, He does all the work of restoration and healing. This means that the *only* obstacle to our being saved is our unwillingness to abide with God. Isn't that an incredible thought?! The *only* thing that has the power to take me out of God's saving hand is . . . me!

And the *only* thing that has the power to take you out of God's saving hand is . . . you! God has given us the power to make that choice, and He respects our decision.

God Calls Us Friends

At the end of His speech on the vine and the branches, Jesus said this: "I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends." In the context of our relationship with God, God makes His intentions very clear to us. He calls us friends. Period. As far as He is concerned, *we are friends*. But one of the amazing things about God is that He gives *us* the power to decide whether or not we're going to have a relationship with Him. He will not force us to choose Him. He will not force us to abide with Him. Instead, He lets us choose, and then He *respects* whatever choice we make.

We see this in the analogy of the vine and the branches. Jesus simply says that the branches which are connected to the vine will bear fruit. And the branches which are not connected to the vine will eventually shrivel up and wither away, and God the Gardener removes them. The Greek word there means "to release" or "to let go." If we decide we want to have nothing to do with God, He will respect that decision and let us go . . . even though it's *not* what *He* wants.

Isn't it amazing that we have a God who longs to be friends with us? And isn't it amazing that we have a God who cares more about our freedom than getting His own way?

Today, Jesus says once again to you and me: "I have called you friends."

And now, He leaves the choice to us. Will we stay or will we go? Will we spend time with Him or will we shun Him? He has called us friends. What will we call Him?

1. Matthew 7:22-23, NIV

Prayers, Etc.

INVOCATION

Source of Life, Source of Goodness, Source of Righteousness, invade our space with Your presence today. Holy Spirit, descend upon our hearts. As we abide in You, rekindle the fire of abundant life in our hearts. Amen.

CALL TO WORSHIP

Come, let us worship Almighty God. He is the Source. He is the true Vine. He cares for us, tends to us, and feeds our souls. Come, let us worship the Lord!

PARTICIPATORY PRAYER *(may be spoken together with the congregation)*

O Great God, You are the vine, and we are the branches. You are the Tender, and we are the tended. Often, we have wanted to grow our own fruit. Often, we have shied away from your pruning shears. Good and patient Gardener, give us rest. Help us to trust in Your good work. Amen.

ASSURANCE OF GOD'S GRACE *(may be spoken by pastor after the Participatory Prayer)*

As the Tender of the vine, God knows just what we need. As we rest in Him, He nourishes us, so that we will flourish in His mercy, love, and grace. Amen.

CALL FOR THE OFFERING

What a blessing and privilege it is to be connected to the Vine. As we remain in Christ, God gives us everything we need. All we require, we receive from His generous hand. As we have received, may we also give. Today's offering is for . . . *(omit if your offering is not specially designated)*

OFFERTORY PRAYER

God, gracious Provider of all our needs, thank You for nourishing us as we rest in You. Thank You for providing for us and teaching us that to be generous with others doesn't leave our needs uncared for. On the contrary, because of Your giving nature, we recognize that stinginess will cause us to miss out on many of Your greatest blessings. Thank You for the continued opportunity to be generous as You are. Amen.

BENEDICTION

And now, may you stay securely in the vine of Christ. May the Father prune you back and cleans you, so that you may bear all the fruits of the Spirit. To the honor and glory of Jesus Christ, our Lord. Amen

CONGREGATIONAL PRAYER

God of Nature, You are the original Gardener. You have created us to be beautiful pieces of Your creation, to flower and flourish for the glory of Your name. You are a gentle and tender Gardener. You cause us to bear fruit, increasing our beauty and honor. Often, we have selfishly coveted that beauty and used it in a way You didn't intend. We are grateful for Your mercy and forgiveness which patiently works on our imperfections.

Gentle Tender of the Vine, You are kindhearted in Your pruning work, but You are thorough. In Your presence, You don't leave us unchanged. You transform us, You shape us, You heal us, and You restore us into Your perfection. You take exquisite care with all Your creation, and we are astounded by Your compassionate and loving character.

Thank You, Lord, for being sensitive with the areas of our life that have been rubbed raw by sorrow and grief. Thank You for being a sympathetic Lover who hears our every cry, sees our every tear, and knows our every hurt. Thank You for hearing us today. **[insert the specific needs of your congregation here]**

Bring us, now, the promised peace that passes understanding as we rest in You. Abiding in You brings a level of comfort to us that we can't find anywhere else. Now and for all time, You alone are worthy to be praised for Your intimate and intensely personal care of our hearts! Amen.

Children's Story

Method: Illustration

Purpose: To help children understand the analogy of the vine and the branches.

Suggested Props: either a freshly-picked tree branch with vibrant, green leaves, or better yet, a small, potted tree with leaves; a dry, dead branch with no leaves (stripped bare); a few green leaves; tape—duct tape would be hilarious, but clear tape will do; an apple (optional)

Good morning, boys and girls. In our Scripture reading today, we're going to hear the story of the Vine and the Branches. Jesus told this story to His disciples, and He was trying to help us understand how our life is connected to our relationship with God.

So, I brought a branch with me this morning that has a lot of green leaves on it. *[Or, I brought a little tree with me this morning.]* Did the branch grow these leaves all by itself? How did the leaves get there?

The leaves appeared on the branch because the branch was connected to . . . a tree. So, what about a branch that isn't connected to a tree? Can it produce any leaves? If I took this branch home and laid it on my kitchen counter *[or, if I broke a branch off my potted tree and took it home and laid it on the kitchen counter]*, would it still be producing green leaves next week? No. It would die.

I brought another branch with me today. This one has been off the tree for quite some time. It's pretty dry and brittle. It doesn't have any leaves at all, does it? I feel bad for this branch.

What do you say we bring it back to life? How about we make it start producing some leaves again? I brought some leaves with me. Let's put some on this branch. *[Take a minute to actually tape several leaves onto the branch. Use as much tape as you need to make them stick!]*

OPTIONAL PARAGRAPH *(if you bring an apple or other piece of fruit)*: Boys and girls, we can even make this branch bear some fruit! I brought an ----apple with me today, and we can get that put on there, too.

So, what do you think about my branch now? Is it alive? [*Hopefully they will say no!*]

It's not alive? But, it looks alive, doesn't it? It's got green leaves on it!

Boys and girls, you're right. It's *not* alive. It is still very dead. And why is it dead? [*Allow children time to think and answer.*]

It's dead because it is no longer connected to the tree. So I can tape all the leaves and fruit I want to on this branch, but if it's not connected to the tree, it's dead.

That's what Jesus said in the story of the Vine and the Branches. He said that *He* is like the vine, or the tree. And *we* are the branches. And when we are connected to Him—like my alive branch over here—we are alive and we will produce leaves and fruit. But when we are *not* connected to Him—like my dead branch over here—we can't produce a thing, no matter what we do.

But, what if we had the ability to take it outside right now and reattach it to the tree. If we could graft it back into the tree trunk, do you think this branch could produce real leaves again?

Yes! And the Bible says that even if we become disconnected from God, even if we are like branches who have fallen off the tree and withered, we can be reattached. God has the power to reconnect us to Him and make us come alive again—for real.

Responsive Reading

God of the vineyard, You are the true vine.

You are the only source of life, love, and liberty.

God of the vineyard, You are the life of the branches.

You nourish, protect, and provide for all Your creatures.

God of the vineyard, You are the tender of the vine.

You care intimately about each of us.

God of the vineyard, You are the pruner of the branches.

You cause us to shine ever more brightly with Your beauty.

God of the vineyard, You are the gardener of the fruit.

You share Your honor and glory with us by producing beautiful fruit in us.

God of the vineyard, You are the respecter of freedom.

You allow the branches to disconnect from You, even when it brings You pain.

God of the vineyard, You are the true vine.

There is no other vineyard like Yours!

Hymn

Before Your Great and Glorious Throne

sung to the tune of *Before Jehovah's Awful Throne* (Duke Street)

alternate tune: *When I Survey the Wondrous Cross* (Hamburg)

Before Your great and glorious throne,
We bow before You, full of joy,
Settled into this truth alone:
What You create, You won't destroy.

You formed us in our mother's womb.
We are the objects of Your love.
You broke the power of the tomb,
So we can live with You above.

We are the branches; You're the vine.
You nourish us as we abide.
Your pruning causes us to shine
As You remove our sin and pride.

Wide are Your arms and strong Your hand.
Vast as the universe, Your love.
Firm as a rock on You, we'll stand
Through ceaseless years in heaven above.

We'll flood the heavens with our songs
Of all the wonders You have done.
Glad to be right where we belong:
With You, the Father, Spirit, Son!

Words by Kelley Lorencin

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Song Suggestions

Hymns

Abide with me (Eventide)

Words and music by Henry F. Lyte and William H. Monk

Chief of sinners (Spanish Hymn)

Words and music by William McComb and Benjamin Carr

Like Jesus

Words and music by A.D. Ellington and Harold A. Miller

Praise Songs

Lose myself

Words and music by Jeff Deyo and Rob Hawkins

© 2002 Emack Music

Make Your home in me

Words and music by Helen Frye and Michael Frye

© 1999 Vineyard Songs

My Jesus, my lifeline

Words and music by Tim Hughes

© 1997 Thankyou Music

Without You

Words and music by Brian Doerksen and Joyce Doerksen

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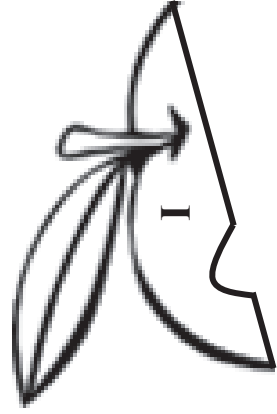
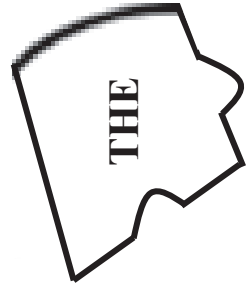
You

Words and music by Rebecca St. James and Tedd Tjornbom

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God is the vine. We are the branches.

Match the puzzle pieces to finish the Bible verse.



Wee Worship

ages 3 to 6

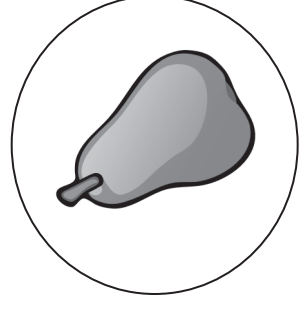
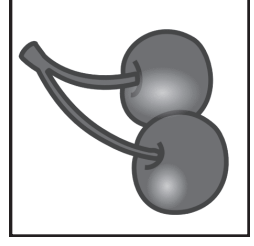
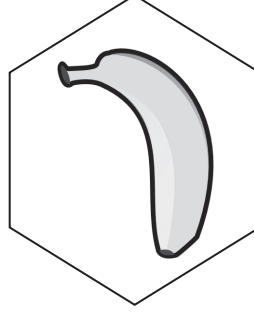
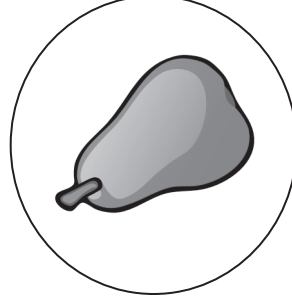
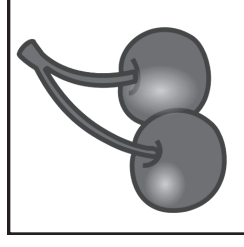
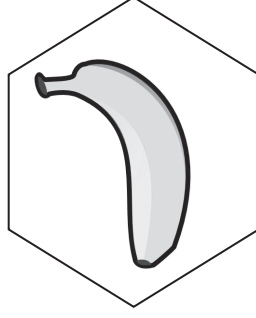
John 15:1-8



The Vine and the Branches

Abiding with God produces spiritual fruit.

Draw a line to match the shapes below.



God wants us to stay connected to Him.



Count the number of grapes in the picture. Circle the correct number below.



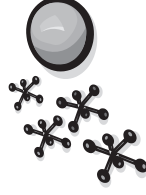
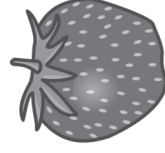
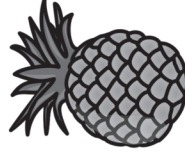
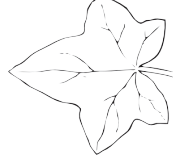
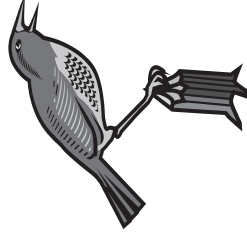
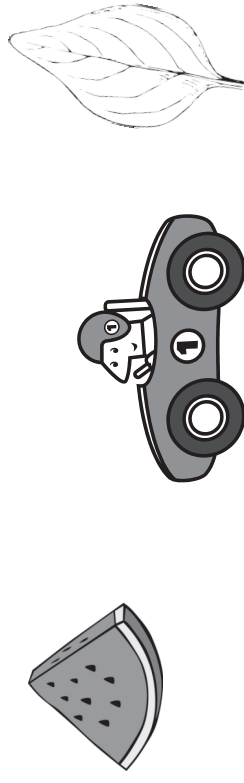
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8

9

Living branches grow leaves and fruit.

Circle the fruit and leaves below.



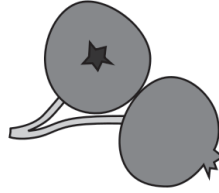
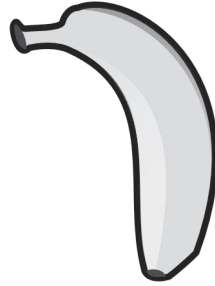


God the Father is like a gardener.

Find the set of letters that will complete each word.

ur^ti fiuluf nev abnhc ryve peu

He cuts off every _ _ r _ _ _ _
in me that bears no f _ _ _ _ _ ,
while _ _ e _ _ branch that
does bear fruit, he _ _ r _ n _ s
so that it will be e _ _ _ _
more _ _ r _ _ t _ _ _ .



iWorship

ages 7 to 12

John 15:1-8

The Vine and the Branches

Jesus is the vine, and we are the branches.

Use the musical note key to find out what God does.



