



Vine and Branches

Goal: To explore how we are connected to Jesus, the Vine.

RECOGNIZING GOD'S GRACE . . .

. . . In John 15:1-8

If you have ever been to a vineyard, you know that both the quantity and the quality of grapes produced is utterly dependent on the vine grower. Without the skill and art of a talented vine grower to manage the soil, nurture, pruning, and tending of the vines, there would be no grapes, or at least no grapes worth harvesting. The vines and branches cannot maintain themselves.

In the Hebrew Scriptures, the vine is usually a symbol for Israel. In this part of the Gospel, the Vine is Jesus himself. In Greek, the words for “cleanse” and “prune” come from the same root word. It is worthwhile to remember that this metaphor intends to point us to Jesus’ call to abide, to dwell permanently in him; it is not meant to be a threat of excommunication or punishment. Jesus is simply describing what his hearers know to be true: the vines must be pruned to encourage growth; what is cut away gets disposed.

And the branches that are going to grow fruit must “abide”—stay connected. To abide in Jesus is to remain in him; to continue to be present and connected to him and, through him, to the other branches. This metaphor calls us, not only to grow and bear fruit, but to continue always in our relationships with Jesus and with one another.

. . . In Your Children's Experiences

If children have some familiarity with farms, or have helped with gardens at home, this metaphor will be easier to grasp. Most children have at least a basic understanding that plants need good soil, sunshine, and care to grow. Children who have not experienced or observed how plants grow may not understand how cutting part of a plant off will help it grow better. You may need to give a simple explanation about that, perhaps explaining that sometimes gardeners or growers need to cut off some of the new stems and leaves so that the old ones can grow stronger and better, and make delicious fruit! It might be useful, too, to explore their knowledge, to be sure they understand that branches that get cut off from the vine can't grow any fruit.

. . . In Your Relationships with the Children

This metaphor of vine and branches is a beautiful demonstration of the importance of staying connected to Jesus and to one another. If you have a vine (real or artificial) with branches, you can use it to talk about how each branch is connected to the main one—the vine—and because they are all connected to the main branch, they are all connected to each other. You may wish to use language that is more simile than metaphor: Jesus is like the main vine, and we are like the branches, all connected! We have to stay connected so we can grow and be a strong and beautiful community.

O Great Vine-Grower, may I abide in Jesus, the Vine, and thus bear the fruit of love and care to teach your children. Amen.



Supplies

Music & Melodies
(MM) 2023–2024

Stories, Colors & More
(SCM) i–iv, 10, 10a, 10b,
16, 21

basic supplies
(see p. vii)

story audio (see p. vii)

candle

green cloth

grape bunches (real,
artificial, or picture)

interlocking plastic
building blocks

grape juice and cups

guest vine-grower or
gardener (optional)

Responding

Claiming

brown paper
lunch bags, green
construction paper,
purple or green ink pad,
wet wipes

Celebrating

hula hoop

Offering

smartphone or tablet

Extra

copies of **Grace Notes**
(GN) 1

GATHERING IN GOD’S GRACE

Post **SCM i–ii**, “Your Visual Schedule,” to provide clear expectations and a visual cue for the group.

See **SCM iii–iv** for the key to icons (for example, **LG** **T**) and ways to adapt for children who have special needs or disabilities.

“Claiming God’s Grace,” “Celebrating God’s Grace,” and “Offering God’s Grace” require more prep.

Welcoming and Preparing

LG **M**

Greet the children by name and with the words “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with you.” Smile and acknowledge your pleasure in seeing them.

As children arrive, invite them to help prepare the worship space. Ask the children to include a Bible, a candle, a green cloth, grapes, and **SCM 10a**.

Ask some children to help prepare today’s “Responding in Gratitude” activities. Suggest that one or two prepare to lead today’s singing. Invite a volunteer to practice the Scripture reading for today.

As children prepare the space, engage in discussion over the ways they are connected to your church community. Wonder together about activities they or their families are involved in, what people they know, and how their connections move out into the wider community. Be sure to share your personal connections with the church community too.

Singing

T

Gather around the worship table. Play, listen to, and sing “I’ve Got the Joy, Joy, Joy, Joy”—**MM 22**; **SCM 21**—to celebrate the joy, peace, and love that we have when we are connected with God.

Praying

C

Offer each child an interlocking plastic building block. Ask children to count the number of dots on top of their block and to come up with that many things they can thank God for. Take turns offering gratitude by saying, “God, I thank you for . . .” Continue until each child has had a turn. Invite children to work together to connect their blocks to one another’s to make a “gratitude structure”—anything that connects all the blocks to one another. Place the structure on the worship table to serve as a reminder throughout today’s session of your connectedness.



Preparing to Hear the Story

L FA

If you have a guest vine-grower or gardener, introduce your guest and invite them to tell the children about growing grapes or other plants and what care they require, including pruning. If you do not have a guest, share some information from “Recognizing God’s Grace” (p. 91) about growing, pruning, and the connection between the vine and the branches.

Give the children grape juice and grapes (if they are real!) to enjoy while they hear the story.

L *Listening to a story or guest speaker can be a challenge for children who struggle with attention. Consider giving them a task such as note taking or asking them to listen for a specific word or phrase. Creating a focus can help children pay better attention to the person speaking.*



Today’s story can be found in *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Louisville, KY: Flyaway Books, 2018), www.pcusastore.com.

Hearing the Story

C L

Invite one of the children to find John 15 in the Bible. Have a volunteer read John 15:1–8. Conclude the reading by saying, “Word of wisdom, Word of grace,” and prompt the children to say, “Thanks be to God.” Place the open Bible on the table.

As you read the story again using **SCM 10** or listen to the story audio, invite the children to listen for the words *vine* and *branches*. Tell them when they hear the word *vine* to respond with the word *branches*. For example, “Vines (*branches*) grow grapes in big clusters.” When they hear the word *branches*, respond with the word *vine*. This back-and-forth response will encourage the connectivity of the vine and branches.

Reflecting on God’s Grace

C L

Engage the children in conversation, using the following questions:

- ▼ Why do you think Jesus compared himself to a vine and us to branches?
- ▼ Imagine Jesus at the table with his friends, sharing this story as he prepared to say goodbye to them. What do you imagine they thought as he spoke? What do you imagine they said when he was done?
- ▼ What does it mean to you to “stay connected to Jesus”? How do you practice that connection?
- ▼ How can we help ourselves and others to be connected to Jesus? To one another?

Singing

Give God an offering of music. Play and sing “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian”—**MM 13; SCM 16**.

Turn off the candle.



RESPONDING IN GRATITUDE

Select activities appropriate for your group and the time available.



Claiming God's Grace



Create a symbol of your church community's connectivity. Provide brown paper lunch bags and have children create a thick, "twisty" vine and thinner pieces coming off as the branches. Have them glue these to mural paper.

Use green construction paper to create leaves. Have the children write their name on a leaf and glue it to a branch. Make extra leaves for others to add their leaves to your vine.

Remind the children that, when the branches are connected to the vine, they produce fruit. Wonder together what "fruit" they produce when they are connected to Jesus. Ideas might be general such as love, peace, joy, generosity, and so forth, or something more specific such as playing with my brother or helping my neighbor. Invite the children to press a finger on the purple or green ink pad and make a few fingerprint grapes on the mural. Encourage them to use a pen or pencil to write a few of their fruits around the grapes. Assist with writing as needed. Suggest that the children make extra bunches of grapes so others may add their fruit ideas to the mural. Provide wet wipes or allow for time to wash hands.

Brainstorm together a title for the mural. Have children add the title. Have a volunteer write directions on a piece of paper to display by the mural, inviting others to add a leaf with their name and write some of their "fruits" by some grapes.

Display the mural, along with the directions, leaves, a glue stick or tape, and pens in a central location in your church as a reminder that you are all connected to one another and to Jesus.



Celebrating God's Grace



Use a hula hoop to play the following games that require connection:

- ▼ Hula Hoop Let Down—Have the children stand in a circle, holding the hula hoop by only letting it rest on their index fingers. Invite them to work together to lower the hula hoop to the ground, not touching it with anything but index fingers.
- ▼ Hula Hoop Pass Through—Have the children stand in a circle, holding hands. Have two children let go and place the hula hoop between the two of them. Have them hold hands once again through the hoop. Invite the children to pass the hoop once around the circle without anyone letting go, just by wiggling and climbing through as they remain linked to the players on either side of them.



Consider together how being connected makes some challenges easier but can make some seem more difficult. Discuss why it may be important not to try to go it alone even when it seems easier. Wonder together what Jesus' story about the vine and branches has to say about what it means to stick together.

Praying God's Grace



Pray a "special signal" prayer. Invite the children to find a partner and create a secret handshake. Allow a few moments for them to create their handshake and then invite partners to do their handshake for the rest of the group. Offer that secret handshakes are often symbols between two friends of their special connection. They greet each other in a way that is special for the two of them.

Invite children to spread out, get comfortable, and imagine a "special signal" they can offer to God as a way to show their connection to God. Ask them to consider what it means that they are connected to God and how they can signal that connection using their hands, and encourage them to use their signal throughout the week as they pray.



Offering God's Grace



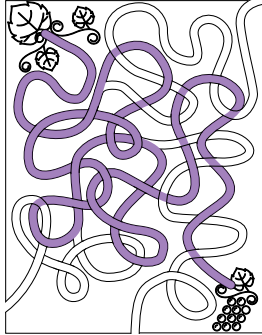
Consider ways to connect with those who are unable to physically connect with the church community right now, such as people at home due to illness or injury, students away at college, or people serving in the military. Invite children to create a skit and a message that they can film and share with these people. Use a smartphone or tablet. Allow the children to direct, film, and act. Watch the video together.

After the session, send the video to the people you have identified or post it on your church's social media, if that is permissible.

LG *Allow children to make choices as they learn the concepts of responsibility and consequences of making decisions. Opportunities to make decisions can lead to better confidence. When kids learn to support others, cooperate, and problem solve as a group, they become better leaders.*



GN 1 Solution:



Ask parents and caregivers for their email addresses so you can send the Grace Sightings link, or invite them to visit www.pcusastore.com/GGGdownloads. Remind the parents and caregivers about the story audio (see p. vii).

Extra Activity

Distribute copies of **GN 1**. Like the broken branches on the ground, sometimes things are just not connected. Challenge the children to find the one path that loops over, under, and through the page to connect the vine at the top with the grapes at the bottom. Suggest that, when we are not truly connected, our path may lead nowhere.

LOVING AND SERVING GOD



Ask the children to help clean the space.

Gather the children in a circle. Hand a ball of yarn to a child and ask her or him to hold tight to the end of the yarn. Explain that the yarn will represent the vine. Tell the children that one of the ways we connect with one another as people of faith around the world is to pray the Lord's Prayer, the prayer that Jesus taught his disciples. Display **SCM 10b** and pray the Lord's Prayer together. At the end of the first line, invite the child to toss the ball across the circle to another child so they can grab onto the vine. Continue tossing the ball at the end of each line, making sure all children have had the chance to connect to the vine. (If you have a large group, pray the prayer multiple times.) Prompt the children, "If the yarn is the vine—or Jesus—we are the _____ (*branches*).

As each child leaves, bless them, saying, "*(Name)*, be connected with Jesus and one another."

