

PEOPLE PRUNING

by Merle Christner

KEY VERSE:

I am the vine, you are the branches. Those who abide in me and I in them bear much fruit, because apart from me you can do nothing. — John 15:5

“This is my commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. — John 15:12

FAITH STORY:

John 15:1-17

FAITH FOCUS:

In this passage, Jesus is giving his disciples the commandment to love. He uses the image of the vine to describe the communion with him that is necessary in order to follow the command. Without continuing communion, no fruit can be produced. Loving others is the fruit of this communion with Jesus. Jesus chooses us as friends and the most a person can do to show love is to lay down his life as Jesus did for us.

SESSION GOAL:

Help students understand that when we have communion or fellowship with Christ we have the ability to love each other as he commanded.

SESSION OBJECTIVES:

By the end of this session, the students will:

- Identify and chart the relationships between the vine, the vinegrower, and the branches.
- Identify and list the differences between being a friend and being a servant.
- List specific ways they can demonstrate their communion with Jesus.

MATERIALS NEEDED AND ADVANCE PREPARATION:

- 1 Bible for each student.
- 2 Invite a person to class who has experience with grapevines or gardening to discuss pruning and fruit bearing; or in the case of flowers, deadheading. If possible, the person should bring a plant to class to demonstrate pruning or dead heading.
- 3 Write and display Key Verses on poster board, newsprint, or chalkboard prior to class.
- 4 Have several sheets of newsprint or sheets from a flipchart available
- 5 Branches or vines for each student. These can be real or something you purchase at a craft store.
- 6 A bowl of assorted fruit
- 7 Scissors—one per student

SESSION OUTLINE

FOCUS: (7–10 minutes)

Welcome students to class.

Introduce the guest, and invite the guest to share about and demonstrate pruning or deadheading. Make the point that it might feel weird or almost wrong to take green foliage or flowers off of a plant, but if done right and for the right reasons, it helps the plant be more fruitful and more productive.

CONNECT: (5 minute)

Say: *Our passage today is about pruning people. Do you have any guesses why there would be something in the Bible about pruning people?*

Encourage students to share what they are thinking—everyone should at least attempt an answer before moving on.

EXPLORE THE BIBLE: (10 minutes)

Hand out Bibles to students. Ask two or three students to read verses 1-8 aloud while the others follow.

Discuss:

- Why did Jesus use the image of the vine and branches as a way of depicting his relationship with his disciples? How could the disciples understand what Jesus was trying to say?

Insight: *The Old Testament uses the vine and branches as a symbol for the Old people of God. (Look up these passages: Psalm. 80:7, Isaiah 5:1, 2, Hosea 10:1) The emphasis usually was on two facts; 1) God was faithful in planting and caring for his vineyard (people), 2) The people's unfaithfulness did not yield good fruit.*

Jesus says he is the "true" vine. This shows graphically that God's salvation is rooted (centered) in him. Fruitbearing is the direct result of communication (communion) with Jesus. Christians are expected to bear fruit in their lives. To be fruitless is not normal nor is it acceptable to God. Branches, or Christians, that bear fruit are also pruned to bear more fruit. Pruning is purifying or cleansing.

- Ask a student to draw a flowchart depicting the relationship between the vinegrower, vines, and branches.
- Ask two or three students to read verses 9-17 aloud while the others follow.
- Have the class identify and list the five love relationships noted in this text:
 1. Father loves His Son, Jesus (v. 9)
 2. Jesus' love for God (v. 10)
 3. Jesus loves his disciples as demonstrated in his death (v. 13)
 4. Disciples are to love Jesus and abide in his love (v. 10)

5. Disciples are to love others (v. 17)

Insight: *We must continue in a loving relationship with God through Jesus in order to bear fruit. The benefits of communion (“remaining” or “abiding”) are obedience and joy. Jesus’ primary command to us is to have mutual love for each other. This may be difficult at times, but we grow by caring for and nurturing each other. The church is the community in which we love as God loves us. The clear demonstration of that love is Christ’s example, which we are asked to imitate.*

In Jesus’ time, students chose the rabbi who would be their teacher. In contrast, Jesus points out that he chose them to be his disciples and they were chosen for a purpose—to bear fruit.

APPLY: (10–15 minutes)

Say: *We heard earlier that pruning can be tough, but it is a good and necessary thing in order for a branch to bear fruit. We all need pruning.*

Hand out the branches or vines to students. Ask them to view the branches/vines as their life, and their relationship with Jesus. Ask them to consider the following:

- In what ways do you need pruning?
- In what ways do you feel like you have been pruned and are bearing fruit?
- Do you feel like you are abiding in Jesus?
- What is your connection to Jesus, the vinegrower?

Ask students to think about these questions and to prune their branches as a symbol of the pruning they are willing to do go through in order to abide in Jesus.

Invite students to take a piece of fruit from the bowl. Go around the room and invite them to share how they can be fruitful as a result of being connected with Jesus. Allow students to pass if they don’t want to share.

RESPOND: (5–10 minutes)

Invite students to take their branches and fruit home. They can eat the fruit and keep the branch/vine as a reminder of today’s lesson.

Form a circle. Have students repeat after you:

Like a careful gardener, prune us, Lord

(Repeat)

Help us to bear the fruit of love

(Repeat)

Abide in us as we leave this place

(Repeat)

Amen.

(Repeat)

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