

1

Live like a Disciple

JOHN 15:1-8



GOAL

Children identify themselves and other members of the congregation as disciples, followers of Jesus, who help them grow in love.

- A** Art
- AM** Active/Movement
- C** Conversation
- D** Drama
- F** Food
- G** Game
- M** Music
- NS** Nature/Science
- QC** Quiet/Contemplative
- S** Service
- T** Technology
- X** Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Loving God, keep me connected to Christ, the true vine, so that I can be his faithful disciple in all I say and do. Amen.

THIS SESSION

To *make* disciples, we need to *be* disciples. Something about Jesus attracted the fishers to leave the familiar and follow him into the unknown. Something about the early Christians attracted others to risk joining a community whose leader had been executed by the state. People saw in Jesus and the early Christians what they wanted in their own lives. When Jesus' followers extend themselves in love, others want to be part of that story.

THE BIBLE STORY

As he often did, Jesus used images and metaphors from what was familiar to his listeners. In a land where grapes are abundantly grown, Jesus said that he is the vine. His followers are the branches, and God is the vine grower or gardener, the one who prunes and cultivates the plant. As long as the branches stay connected to the vine and are carefully pruned by the gardener, they produce much good fruit. Likewise, when Jesus' followers stay connected to him, they grow as disciples and bear good fruit that demonstrates to others what it means to follow Jesus.

CONNECTIONS WITH CHILDREN

Young children who attend church may be familiar with the phrase "Jesus and the disciples." Those disciples lived in Bible times, wore clothes like robes and tunics, and were Jesus' best friends.

Children can discover more about them, however, learning that a disciple is known by their *fruit*, those things that bear witness to following Jesus, loving God and neighbor as Jesus taught. They can be encouraged to identify themselves and others in the congregation as disciples, followers of Jesus.

SESSION PREPARATION

Food is used several times in this session. Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

- "Where Do Grapes Come From?" (p. 8): Obtain grapes on the stem.

- Depending on the options you choose:
- "The Good for Nothing Tree" (p. 9): Obtain *The Good for Nothing Tree* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Flyaway Books, 2022) or use the YouTube video "The Good for Nothing Tree Read Aloud" ([bit.ly /FMNothingTree](https://bit.ly/FMNothingTree), 4:28). Obtain fig cookies, and gluten-free fig cookies, if necessary.
- "Plug In to Jesus" (p. 10): Obtain an electric lamp.
- "Bearing Fruit" (p. 11): Obtain several oranges.



GETTING STARTED

- Bunch(es) of grapes with stem
- Scissors or plastic knife
- Napkins
- Internet-connected device

WHERE DO GRAPES COME FROM?



Welcome the children as they arrive and invite them to sit at a table. Engage them in conversation about gardening. Wonder if anyone grows plants: fruits, vegetables, herbs, or flowers. Ask them about the growing process and how they tend their plants. If no one has experience with gardening, invite them to imagine what they would like to grow and why.

When everyone has arrived, place a bunch of grapes in the center of the table. Using scissors or a plastic knife, cut the bunch of grapes into smaller clusters. Give each child a cluster of grapes and a napkin. Invite the children to eat the grapes while you talk. Ask the children if they have ever seen how grapes grow. Invite the children to watch a video, a timelapse showing grapes growing much faster than they actually do. Ask the children to watch for the grapes to appear and to raise their hands when they see the grapes. Show the YouTube video “Yealands Winery Vine Growing Timelapse” (bit.ly/FMGrapesGrowing, 1:05).

Ask the children what they noticed about how grapes grow. Note that grapes grow in bunches on vines. Invite the children to look at the stems from which they picked their grapes and wonder if more grapes will grow there. Point out that, once a branch is broken off the vine, no more grapes will grow there. Branches need to stay connected to the vine to grow grapes.



Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

- Internet-connected device

HERE I AM



Read aloud: “Jesus said, ‘All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me.’ Live like a disciple.”

Then show the YouTube video “20201011 Kids Choir Present—Here I Am, Lord” (bit.ly/FMHereIAmChildren, 4:31, beginning at 0:50 and stopping at 1:27). Play it again, inviting the children to sing along. You may need to prompt the words for each line as they appear on the screen.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

WHO IS A DISCIPLE?



Invite the children to play a game of Follow the Leader. After the children have taken turns being the leader, ask:

- When you are a follower, what do you do?
- Who are the leaders that people follow in their lives?
- Who are the leaders that you try to follow?

Tell the children that another word for a *follower* is *disciple*. Wonder who were followers or disciples of Jesus. Comment that often, when we hear about Jesus’ disciples, it is usually referring to the twelve men who are named in the Bible as his first disciples. Explain that, while they traveled with Jesus as he taught and healed people, there were more than twelve disciples, and there were women as well as men who followed Jesus.

Engage the children in conversation using the following questions:

- ➔ How do you think people can follow Jesus if they can't see him or be around him?
- ➔ What do people do or say that shows you they are a disciple of Jesus?
- ➔ Who do you know who is a disciple of Jesus?

Tell the children that you are Jesus' disciple. Help the children identify diverse examples of disciples from your congregation. Include all ages and identify the ways in which the individuals live out their discipleship. Affirm that the children are disciples too.



Intergenerational relationships play an important role in children's faith development. Acquainting the children with members of the congregation and the roles they play may lead to some disciple-making connections.

FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

GROWING GOOD FRUIT

C

Tell the children that Jesus used examples from nature and everyday life to teach people about God, himself, and living as disciples. Comment that one of these lessons from nature is found in John 15:1–8, one of the books of the Bible that tell the stories about Jesus. Show the children where it is found in the Bible. Then read aloud the adapted Bible story from John 15:1–8 from “The True Vine” (pp. 330–331) in *Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim or Resource Page 1.

After the story, invite the children to wonder with you about the following:

- I wonder how we can stay connected to Jesus.
- Surely Jesus doesn't expect us to start growing grapes! I wonder what good fruit Jesus wants us to grow.
- If I see an apple growing on a tree, I know it is an apple tree. I wonder how people know that we are Jesus' disciples.

- Bible
- Growing in God's Love: A Story Bible* edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim (Flyaway Books, 2018) or Resource Page 1



The apostle Paul uses “fruit of the Spirit” to list nine admirable characteristics that show themselves in daily living as a result of drawing near to God: “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, generosity, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control” (Galatians 5:22–23).

FINDING THE PRACTICE ALL AROUND US

Choose one or more options.

THE GOOD FOR NOTHING TREE

C F X

Tell the children that the story they heard from John is not the only time Jesus talked about the importance of growing fruit. Explain that you will read another story Jesus told about a fig tree and its fruit. Read aloud *The Good for Nothing Tree* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso or show the YouTube video “The Good for Nothing Tree Read Aloud” (bit.ly/FMNothingTree, 4:28).

After the story, ask the following questions:

- ➔ Why did some people think the tree was “good for nothing”?
- ➔ Why do you think the children did not give up on the tree?
- ➔ Was the tree good for nothing?
- ➔ What did the tree need?
- ➔ What do disciples need to grow?

- The Good for Nothing Tree* by Amy-Jill Levine and Sandy Eisenberg Sasso (Flyaway Books, 2022)
- Internet-connected device (optional)
- Fig cookies, gluten-free fig cookies, if necessary
- Napkins
- Beverage
- Cups



Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.

- How can we be patient with people who are growing as disciples of Jesus?
- How can we be patient with ourselves as we grow?

Wonder who has seen a fig tree or tasted a fig. Distribute the napkins, fig cookies, cups, and beverages and invite the children to share a snack.

Electric lamp

PLUG IN TO JESUS

C X

Tell the children that Jesus used items from his place and time to teach people about himself and God’s love, but there are items that Jesus wouldn’t have had that can help us understand his teachings too. To illustrate Jesus’ teaching with a different metaphor, place an unplugged electric lamp in front of the children. Turn the switch on and wonder why it won’t come on. Comment that the lamp worked in your home and ask them if they know why the lamp will not light. After plugging in the lamp and turning it on, thank the children for helping you fix the problem. Ask the children:

- What was wrong with the lamp?
- Why is the lamp now able to light the room?
- If we unplug the lamp now, will it still light?
- How are Jesus’ disciples like this lamp?
- What do we need to be connected to so we can give light?
- How do we stay plugged in to Jesus?

Internet-connected device

“LORD, I WANT TO BE A CHRISTIAN”

M T

Comment that there is an African American spiritual about being a disciple called “Lord, I Want to Be a Christian.” Tell them that the first verse says, “I want to be a Christian,” the second verse says, “I want to be more loving,” and the third verse says, “I want to be like Jesus.” Wonder what it means to be like Jesus. Suggest that this song is the prayer of a disciple, to be more like Jesus. Show the YouTube video “I Want to Be a Christian—Kid’s Bible Song with Lyrics” (bit.ly/FMBeAChristian, 2:02) and invite the children to sing along and follow the motions with the song.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

Copies of Resource Page 2

Crayons

GOOD FRUIT

A C QC

Ask the children what kind of fruit Jesus’ disciples are trying to grow. Wonder how we can show other people that we are following Jesus. Provide copies of Resource Page 2 and crayons. Invite the children to look at the pictures and describe ways they can show they belong to Jesus and are trying to live as his disciple. One example might be that they will share toys as they point to the picture of the girl with the toy box. Each time someone gives an example of *good fruit* that shows a life of discipleship, encourage the children to color that grape. Note that two grapes are left blank. Invite the children to share an idea that isn’t pictured. Suggest that they can draw a picture, or you can write their suggestion in their grape. Affirm the children’s responses and encourage the children to put these ideas into practice this week.


BEARING FRUIT

AM G M T

Invite the children to sit in a circle for a game. Tell the children that you will give them an orange to pass around the circle as the music is playing. Explain that, when the music stops, the person with the fruit says, “I am a disciple. I am growing . . .” and names a good *fruit* that they are growing in their life, an action or quality that is like Jesus. This might be an action like helping my mom, being a good listener, or telling God “Thank you.” It might be a quality such as love, kindness, peace, or joy. Assure children that they may repeat what someone else has said. When the child is finished, start the music and resume the game. If you are using an internet-connected device, a good YouTube video to use is “120 Mins Happy Music for Playtime—Playtime Music for Kids and Toddlers” (bit.ly/FMHappyMusic, 2:02:00).

After the game, cut the oranges into slices and have the children enjoy the sweet fruit.

-
- Several oranges
 - Cutting board or plate
 - Knife
 - Napkins
 - Music player and lively music or internet-connected device

 Be aware of food allergies and dietary restrictions. Make substitutions or provide alternative options.



FOLLOWING JESUS

THE DISCIPLE SONG

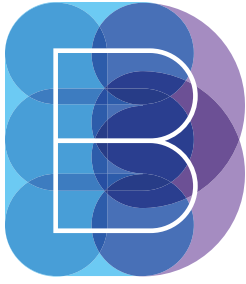
M T

Invite the children to gather in a circle. Introduce the song you will sing to close each session of this unit. Tell the children that it is a call-and-response song, meaning that you will sing a line, and they will repeat it after you. Use the words below, sung to the song “Frère Jacques.” Point out that, in the last line of the first verse, you will say “Every day,” and the children will respond, “Every way.” If you would like accompaniment, use the YouTube video “Frères Jacques (Instrumental)—Cartoon-Free, Distraction-Free” (bit.ly/FMFreresInstrumental, 1:15).

A disciple. /
Yes, I am. /
I will live like Jesus. /
Every day, every way.

The video provides instrumentation for four verses so the children can sing the verse several times. Try beginning softly and getting louder on one verse, having the children follow you as you walk for another verse, or inviting the children to add motions.

-
- Internet-connected device



BIBLE STORY

BASED ON JOHN 15:1-8

Have you ever seen a field filled with grapevines? As Jesus and the disciples walked from village to village, they saw many fields of grapes called vineyards. He used the image of grapevines to teach about himself.

Jesus said, “I am the true vine, and God is the owner of the vineyard. All the branches that grow from me will live and bear grapes. God removes the dead branches to keep the healthy branches connected to me.

“You have been shaped by the good news that I taught you. Stay connected to me in the same way that I live in you. Branches do not live and produce fruit unless they are connected to the vine. You can do nothing if you are not alive in me.

“I am the vine, and you are the branches. Like the branches on the vine, as long as you are connected to me you will live and do loving things. If you stay connected to me, ask for what you need and you will receive it. You love God when you are connected to me. You remember God when your life bears fruit and you are my followers.”



“The True Vine,” excerpted from *Growing in God’s Love: A Story Bible*, edited by Elizabeth F. Caldwell and Carol A. Wehrheim, © 2018 Flyaway Books, 330. Used by permission.

