

I AM the True Vine (John 15:1) Lesson

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Jesus said, "I AM the True Vine" (John 15:1)

Lesson Eight: The True Vine

Main idea: Jesus helps us to grow when we stay connected to him.

Series: This study is part of a 8- part series on the **I AM** statements of Jesus. Follow that link to find the other lesson plans.

Teacher preparation:

- Read Scripture references, Isaiah 5:1-7, Psalm 80:7-19, and Hebrews 12:7-12.
- Gather: Bible; dry erase markers or chart paper and markers; review game card (download [here](#) and [here](#)) printed and cut out; several packets of purple Kool aid unsweetened drink mixes (off brand works too); green paint (or green Kool aid); cornstarch; small containers (Dixie cups work well); paintbrushes; watercolor paper or white/light blue construction paper; pictures of grapevines; smocks, aprons, large t-shirts or garbage bags to use as smocks; plastic table cloths or newspaper to cover tables.
- Take time to meditate on this week's Scripture and think about your own life. Are you remaining in Jesus, the true grapevine, or do you try to cling to other, false vines? Are you abiding in Jesus by obeying his command to love one another? What sort of fruit is your life bearing?

Scripture references:

- John 15:1-8
- Isaiah 64:6
- Matthew 7:17-18
- Galatians 5:22-23
- John 15:9-10, 17
- Hebrews 12:11

Related Ideas:

- View the [other lesson plans](#) in this series
- Review a [preschool lesson](#) based on this theme from a different writer on our site
- Print our free [coloring pages about communion / Lord's Supper](#)

Game: Seven I AM statements review game.

To prepare, print the “I AM review” game on cardstock. Color the pictures if you desire. This is a memory game, so make sure you cannot see the words or images through the back of the paper. If you can, glue the game pieces to construction paper before cutting them out. Prepare enough copies that every child will be able to collect each I AM statement in a pair, plus a few extras. (One page per child.) This is a standard memory game. Before playing, you may wish to review the past several weeks of class. You can do this by reading the first paragraph of the message. To play, lay all the pieces upside down on the table or floor. Make sure they are mixed up well. Children take turns turning over two cards at a time. If they match, they get to keep the cards. There are several ways to determine a winner. You can have the winner be the first to collect a certain number of pairs, say, five pairs. You can play for a certain amount of time, and declare the winner the one with the most pairs. To make it a little more difficult, you can say the winner is the one who collects all seven I AM statements. To do this, they may not collect a pair more than once. (If they find the Bread of Life twice, for example, they have to put it back the second time.) For older students who need more of a challenge, print off and prepare copies of the “I AM review challenging” game. For this game, players must match the I AM statement with the main idea about that statement. For example, the main idea from the Bread of Life lesson is Jesus “fills up our spiritual needs.” Determine a winner in one of the ways described above.

Message:

Open in prayer, then say, today we finish our study on the seven I AM statements Jesus made, which are recorded in the book of John! Each time Jesus says “I AM,” he is saying that he is God. (Make a two column chart on the board. In the left column, write “I AM,” and in the right column, write “God.”) Each I AM statement also reveals to us a new part of Jesus’ character. It tells us a little more about who Jesus is. We have learned that he is the Bread of Life, and fills up all our spiritual needs. (In the left column, write “Bread of Life,” and in the right column, write “fills our spiritual needs.”) We have also learned that he is the Light of the World, and he lights up our spiritual darkness. (In the left column, write “Light of the World,” and in the right column, write “lights up our spiritual darkness”) We learned that

Jesus is the door to the sheepfold, and the only entrance to salvation. (Left column: “door to the sheepfold.” Right column: “only entrance to salvation.”) He is the Good Shepherd who sacrificed his life for our lives. (Left column: “Good Shepherd.” Right column: “sacrificed his life for our lives.”) Next we learned that Jesus is the resurrection and the life, and that he has all power over life and death. (Left column: “Resurrection and life.” Right column: “has all power over life and death.”) Last week we discovered that Jesus is the way, the truth and the life, and he provides comfort and certainty in an uncertain world. (Left column: “way, truth, life.” Right column: comfort and certainty in an uncertain world.”) You may have been able to guess the last I AM statement from today’s review game. Can anybody tell me what the last statement is? (Allow a student to respond.) That’s right, the last I AM statement Jesus made in the book of John is “I AM the true grapevine.” Jesus helps us grow when we stay connected to him.

Let’s practice careful listening as I read today’s main passage, which is found in John 15:1-8. There are a few words in this passage that get repeated a lot. This tells us that they are important. Jesus is using something that everyone at the time would have known about: grapevines. Listen closely and get a good picture of what he is talking about in your head. Now, I am going to divide you into four groups. (Divide them into even groups now.) As I read, I want group one to listen carefully and count how many times you hear the word “grapevine” or “vine” mentioned in this passage. Don’t say the numbers out loud, keep them to yourselves until I ask you once I finish reading. Group two, I want you to count the number of times I say “branch” or “branches.” Group three, quietly count up how many times you hear the word “fruit” or “fruitful.” Group four, count up how many times I say “remain.” Does everyone understand? Great. Listen closely to the whole story and carefully count your words as I read from John 15:1-8. (Passage taken from the New Living Translation.)

“I am the true grapevine, and my Father is the gardener. ² He cuts off every branch of mine that doesn’t produce fruit, and he prunes the branches that do bear fruit so they will produce even more. ³ You have already been pruned and purified by the message I have given you. ⁴ Remain in me, and I will remain in you. For a branch cannot produce fruit if it is severed from the vine, and you cannot be fruitful unless you remain in me. ⁵ “Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit. For apart from me you can do nothing. ⁶ Anyone who does not remain in me is thrown away like a useless branch and withers. Such branches are gathered into a pile to be burned. ⁷ But if you remain in me and my words remain in you, you may ask for anything you want, and it will be granted! ⁸ When you produce much fruit, you are my true disciples. This brings great glory to my Father.”

Great listening, everyone! Group one, how many times did you hear the word “grapevine” or “vine?” That’s right, it was repeated three times. Group two, how many times did I say “branch” or “branches?” Yes, that word came up six times! Group three, how many times was the word “fruit” or “fruitful” repeated? Yes, that was repeated six times too. Now group four, how many times did you hear the word “remain” in this passage? Correct, the word “remain” appeared seven times in eight verses! As you can all see, these words appear quite a bit! Let’s dig a little deeper into their meaning in this passage, so we can better understand what Jesus

means when he says “I AM the true grapevine.”

We'll start by looking at group one's word: “grapevine,” or “vine.” Jesus says in verse one that he is the true grapevine. Chances are, not too many of us have much experience with grapevines. People in Jesus' time would have been very familiar with grapevines. They grew everywhere. When Jesus says he is the vine, we can also picture a tree. (As you describe this illustration, feel free to draw a diagram on the board of a vine with branches and fruit. Label each part with its spiritual representation as you go.) Jesus is the trunk of that tree, and the roots that go deep down into the ground. All of the branches are connected to the tree, or the grapevine. The branches cannot produce leaves and fruit by themselves. If you break a branch off an apple tree and keep it in your room, are apples going to grow off that branch? Of course not! Why not? (Allow a student to answer.) Right. The branch cannot grow fruit unless it is attached to the tree trunk. Grapes don't grow unless the branch is attached to the grapevine. So Jesus is the grapevine. Who do you think the branches are in this illustration? (Allow a student to answer.) That's right, we are the branches. We can only grow and bear fruit when we are attached to Jesus. Now in verse one, Jesus said he is the TRUE grapevine. Do you think that means that there are false grapevines? What are some false vines? What are some things we may try to attach ourselves to? What things do we turn to, to help us instead of Jesus? (Allow students to respond. Write their responses on the board under the heading “False vines.” A few acceptable answers include money and financial stability; friends and being popular – our social status; gaining a lot of knowledge and succeeding through our own strength.) That's quite a list we made there. Sometimes we may be tempted to turn to other things than Jesus to make our lives good. But can we take a grape branch, tape it to a cherry tree, and expect it to keep growing grapes? Nope, that would be silly. The grape branch will die if it gets cut off from the vine. We have to stay attached to Jesus in order to grow. So Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. We need to remain in, cling close to Jesus, in order to grow as Christians. Without Jesus, we die spiritually. If we want to go to heaven and spend all of forever with Jesus, we have to stick with him. The branches need the vine to survive, but the vine does not need to branches to survive.

Let's look now at the fruit. Jesus says in this passage that we can only produce fruit when we remain in him. What fruit is he talking about? Well, Bible scholars, people who spend their whole lives studying the Bible, have some different thoughts on what this fruit may be. All in all, fruit is basically good stuff. Fruit is tasty, isn't it? Fruit makes a great breakfast, dessert, or midday snack. It's sweet and juicy and there are all kinds. Fruit is good for you. So I think fruit is the good stuff that comes out of your life when you follow, remain in, and cling to Jesus. Before we are saved and begin to follow Jesus, our lives are often filled with bad fruit. We are sinners and before we follow Jesus and stick to him, the only fruit we can make is the bad fruit of sin. Sure, we can do good things before we are saved, but the Bible has something to say about our own righteousness. Let's have a sword drill to see what. Remove all bookmarks and fingers from your Bible and hold it above your head. When I say go, look up Isaiah 64:6. Go! (Read, or have a student read, Isaiah 64:6.) “We are all infected and impure with sin. When we display our righteous deeds, they are nothing but filthy rags. Like autumn leaves, we wither and fall, and our sins sweep us away like the wind.” This verse tells us that

even the good things we do are just nasty dirty rags, when we do things apart from God, when we try to do things on our own strength. Matthew 7:17-18 says, “A good tree produces good fruit, and a bad tree produces bad fruit. ¹⁸ A good tree can’t produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can’t produce good fruit.” So we have to stay attached to the true vine, Jesus, so we can produce good fruit. I am sure we have a pretty good idea of some of the bad fruits we can produce when we are not following Jesus. Let’s look at some good fruits the Bible talks about in Galatians 5:22-23. “But the Holy Spirit produces this kind of fruit in our lives: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness, and self-control. There is no law against these things!” This makes a good sort of checklist for us. It can help us to see if we are remaining close to the true grapevine. We can look at our lives, check our actions, words and thoughts and decide if we are showing love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control in the things we say, think and do.

I think we have covered our last word pretty thoroughly by now. “Remain.” We, as branches, have to remain in Jesus, the grapevine, so we can bear good fruit. We are human sinners, though. We cannot remain in Jesus without his help. Our passage tells us that when we remain in Jesus, he remains in us. This “remaining” means to cling, to stick close to. Verses 9-10 of John 15 tell us a little more about remaining. Listen as I read those verses now. “I have loved you even as the Father has loved me. Remain in my love. ¹⁰ When you obey my commandments, you remain in my love, just as I obey my Father’s commandments and remain in his love.” We remain in Jesus, we stick with and follow him, when we obey his commands. Obeying his commands is showing Jesus we love him. We know his commands are the words of the Bible. John 15:17 sums it up nicely. In it, Jesus says, “This is my command: Love each other.” We remain in Jesus and bear good fruit when we love each other.

The last part of the passage we’ll discuss is the part about pruning. John 15:2 tells us that God will cut off any branch that does not bear fruit. This is talking about people who say they follow Jesus, who call themselves Christians, but don’t really stick with Jesus. They may go to church every Sunday, but they don’t bear fruit because they do not obey Jesus. So God cuts them away. Then verse two tells us that branches that do bear fruit will be pruned, or cut back so they can bear more fruit. Sometimes, God will take good things from our lives. He does this to help us grow more fruit. I have a lime tree in my front window. I water it and take good care of it. Soon, it started to produce fruit. Lime trees grow a bunch of limes all on one branch sometimes five or six. But if you leave all those limes on the one branch, they get too crowded and don’t grow. In order to get good limes off my lime tree I have to cut away all but one or two of the limes. That is what God does with us. He will take away good things in order to let better things grow in our lives. Hebrews 12:11 says, “No discipline is enjoyable while it is happening—it’s painful! But afterward there will be a peaceful harvest of right living for those who are trained in this way.” God disciplines us, prunes us, so we can grow a good harvest.

Jesus is the true vine. We remain in him by obeying his commands and loving him. The true vine provides us with what we need to live fruitful lives. Jesus helps us to grow when we stay connected to him.

Craft: True Vine Paintings

Before class, mix up a batch of grape scratch and sniff paint. Mix $\frac{1}{4}$ cup water with one packet grape kool aid and 1 tablespoon cornstarch. (Feel free to play around with the amounts of water and cornstarch to create thicker or thinner paint). If it separates before use, just give it a mix right before passing it out to the kids. Cover the work spaces and put smocks on the kids. Kool aid will stain clothes! Have children start by writing their name on the back of their white or light colored construction paper. Show them pictures of grapevines to help them in their painting. Then have them paint a green vine and a few leaves, then give them the purple scratch and sniff paint to paint the grape bunches. Leave room at the bottom to write "Yes, I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me, and I in them, will produce much fruit." Let dry completely before taking these home.