

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 3/Living As Branches

What we want students to learn: That as Christ-followers, “remaining in Jesus” is essential to their identity, even if it means pruning-away other aspects of their lives.

What we want students to do with what they’ve learned: To assess where they are in their “connectivity” to Christ, and come up with a plan to get more connected to Him.

Scripture Focus: John 15:1-8

Overview: When it comes to our students and the world they live in, there is so much that vies for their attention. Sports, friends, hobbies, entertainment, and so on . . . Each of these aspects of their lives (and many more) consumes a part of them. Their passion, energy, time, and pure affection are divided among so many different things, and if they aren’t careful these things can become distractions. But Jesus says in John 15 that part of their identity as a Christ-follower is that He would command the largest part of their attention and affection. That is what it means to “remain” in Jesus. Christ-followers are to be intertwined with Jesus. Our identity is to be found in Him. This means that occasionally, God may bring us to the place where we recognize distractions in our lives for what they really are. In these moments, God leads us to make choices that are sometimes tough. But, this “pruning” is part of growing in our devotion to Christ. This lesson will challenge your students to examine their faith and how fully they are “remaining” in Jesus.

Teacher Prep Video

The *Jesus And Identity* Teacher Prep Videos are short videos designed to help you grasp the main points of the lessons as you prepare to teach.

To access your “*Jesus And Identity* Lesson 3 Teacher Prep Video,” click on the URL below.

- <https://youthministry360.com/jesus-and-identity-teacher-prep>

Bible Background

The Bible Background is designed to help you provide some context for the Scripture you’ll be studying. The Details gives you background info for each book, The Setting informs you what’s happening in and around the passage, and The Main Point gives you an overview of how the passage will be used in the lesson.

- **What do we mean by “context”?** In every ym360 Bible study lesson, you’ll notice we make a point to encourage you to provide the context for the passages you study. By “context” we mean at the very least helping students know who wrote the book, when it was written, and why it was written.
- **What’s The Big Deal?** When we teach the Bible without giving context, students don’t get a “big picture” understanding of the story of the Bible. But this view is vital to grasping the story of God’s plan of redemption for humankind. As you teach, use the Bible Background to help summarize the context.

The Details

- **Author:** The Gospel of John was written by John, son of Zebedee, a fisherman who left his trade to follow Jesus. John also penned the book of Revelation as well as the three letters in the New Testament that bear his name.
- **Time frame:** The Gospel of John was probably written between 85 and 95 AD. John most likely wrote his gospel in Ephesus before he was exiled to Patmos.

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 3/Living As Branches

- **Purpose:** John's stated purpose for writing this book can be found in John 20:30-31, the last two verses in his gospel: "Now Jesus did many other signs in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name." John's goal seems to have been to clearly communicate a full theology of Jesus as the Messiah, the promised Son of God.

The Setting

John 15 comes in the midst of what the ESV Study Bible calls, "the farewell discourse." This is a great term describing exactly what Jesus is doing in chapters 13-20. Jesus is at the end of His earthly ministry and is preparing His disciples to carry on without Him. The "vine and the branches" narrative comes on the heels of the Last Supper. It is as if Jesus is trying to impart some of His deepest teachings as He nears the end of His time with the disciples.

The Main Point

The main point of this passage is simple: our students can't embrace their true identity as Christ-followers if they lived disconnected from Christ. To fulfill their calling and to be who Christ intends them to be, they must strive to stay plugged-in to Jesus on a daily basis. If we are to live fruitful lives as Christ-followers, Jesus can't be one of many objects of our affection. He must be primary. That's what this passage teaches.

Lesson Plan

The Lesson Plan contains three elements: An introductory activity called The Lead In; the Bible study section called The Main Event; an application-focused segment called The Last Word.

The Lead In

- **Goal:** To help students begin to think about the idea of something being essential to our survival.
- **Set-Up:** Print the "Lesson 3 Lead In Activity Sheet" (located in your Lesson 3 folder). Be prepared to tape each page of the sheet in a prominent location (such as a dry-erase board) where all your students can see.

FIRST, explain to students that you want them to imagine the following scenario:

- **Through many mysterious events that are far too complex to get into in this very short introductory activity, they find themselves alone on a deserted tropical island in the middle of the ocean. Alone except for a crate of the following objects.**

(At this time, tape the pictures of the various objects on your dry-erase board while you call out the names of the objects.)

NEXT, explain to students that these objects are the keys to their survival. But, explain that they have a difficult choice to make: they must choose as a group to discard one of the five objects. Allow the class to come up with the object they want to discard. Encourage them to think about why they can do without the item they've chosen to toss out. When they've come to a consensus, remove the object from the dry-erase board.

THEN, do the same thing again. Explain that they now have to part with an additional item. Ask them which one of the four items they think is least essential to their survival. Allow them to debate, removing the one that most of the students have chosen to do without. Repeat this process until you are down to one final object.

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 3/Living As Branches

NEXT, lead students in a short discussion. Ask:

- **Who here thinks he or she could actually survive given this object on a desert island?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **How long do you think you could make it before help came?**
 - o Answers will vary.
- **In essence, what you were saying in your voting was that the last object on this board was the most important one. How many of you agree that this object is the most important?**
 - o Allow one student who does not agree to explain why he or she disagrees.

FINALLY, explain that this scenario was a fun game, but it had an interesting point: the more we took away objects, the more important the objects were that remained. Explain to students that this lesson is going to look at a similar principle.

Say something like:

- **As part of your identity as a Christ-follower, Jesus is supposed to be first in your life, the most important relationship you have. Jesus is kind of like (insert the final object you left on the board). He is our most important survival resource. We simply can't live without Him. But don't take my word or it. Let's see what Jesus had to say about it. This lesson is a good one. Let's get started.**

The Main Event

- **Goal:** To help your students understand that as Christ-followers, "remaining in Jesus" is essential to their identity, even if it means pruning-away other aspects of their lives.
- **Set Up:** No set up needed.

FIRST, make sure you provide a few moments to review what you learned about identity in Lessons 1 and 2. (If you are feeling extra awesome, make up some sort of game with rewards to help them review each week.) Use the following bullet points to review:

- **Lesson 1: Jesus called us to be salt and light in the world, impacting others in His name.**
- **Lesson 1: The goal of living as salt and light should be that our lives point people toward God.**
- **Lesson 2: To be great in God's eyes you must serve others, putting their needs above your own.**
- **Lesson 2: The key to serving others is to embrace humility, the idea that it's more valuable for others to be fulfilled before you.**

THEN, when you've finished, explain that you're going to start today's look at what Jesus had to say about our identity by looking in the Gospel of John. Instruct students to turn to John 15. While students are looking, make sure you take a few moments to provide the context for the passage using the Bible Background. Pay close attention to the Setting. Summarize it for your students so that they grasp exactly when this passage of Scripture occurs in Jesus' ministry.

NEXT, read or have a student read John 15:1-8. Then, explain to students that you're going to do something a little out of the ordinary today. Explain that you're going to focus on John 15:5-8 before you focus on John 15:1-4. (NOTE: You certainly don't have to do this. But, it's easier to have the "pruning" discussion once you've already set-up the metaphor of the vine and the branches. But, you can certainly do it in order if you wish, simply by flip-flopping these two sections of questions.)

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 3/Living As Branches

Direct students' attention to John 15:5-8 and ask something like:

- **Let's get on the same page. Recall that when Jesus would teach His followers, He would often use metaphors, or word pictures to make His point. These word pictures used images from everyday life that His audience could relate to. What is the word picture Jesus is using here?**
 - o Answer: The image of olive or grape vines and the branches that grow off of them.
- **Looking at verses 5-6, can you tell what truth Jesus is teaching through this word picture? What is He trying to say about our lives/identity?**
 - o Answer: That Jesus is like the main vine that grows out of the ground. The branches grow out of the vine and get all of their life from the vine.
- **What does Jesus mean when He says that we are to "remain in Him"?**
 - o Answer: Guide students to grasp the idea that just like a branch is connected to the vine, we are to remain connected to Jesus.
- **It's easy for a branch to "remain" in the vine. How do we, as real people serving a real God, "remain" in Christ? In other words, how do we practically stay connected to Jesus?**
 - o Answer: Through meeting Jesus regularly by reading and meditating on His Word; by talking and listening to God in prayer; by praising and worshipping Him both individually and in community with our church; by recognizing evidence of God in nature, and so on.

THEN, explain that when Jesus said that by remaining in Him we will "bear much fruit," He was once again using the vine and the branch as a metaphor. Explain to students that the fruit an olive branch produces is olives. That's the nature of the branch's identity. To produce olives, the branch must stay connected to the vine. Explain that we produce fruit as well.

Ask:

- **As Christ-followers, what does it mean that we produce fruit?**
 - o Answer: Our fruit is the evidence of God in us. It's the outflow of the Holy Spirit working in and through us as a result of the salvation we have through faith in Jesus.
- **What is an example of this fruit?**
 - o Answers will vary. Lead students to see that the fruit we produce is all of the godly aspects of our characters and all of the Christ-like actions in our lives. Ultimately, if it is good and pleasing to God, it's the fruit (or evidence) of Jesus working through us.
- **In verse 8, Jesus gives a glimpse into the purpose of the fruit we bear as Christ-followers. What did He say it is?**
 - o Answer: To bring glory to God.

NEXT, challenge students to grasp this idea that a major part of their identity as Christ-followers is their connectedness to Jesus. Part of being a follower is remaining in Christ, through the ways you discussed earlier. Explain that this is the key to having a meaningful, productive life as a Christ-follower. But, explain that there is an aspect of remaining in Christ that's worth a second look.

Explain to students that now that they have this whole word picture figured out, you're going to jump back

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 3/Living As Branches

up to verses 1-2 to look at a unique aspect of their relationship with God. Direct students' attention to these verses, re-reading them if you choose.

Then, ask:

- **Jesus passes along a huge insight into the roles of the Trinity. Jesus said He is the vine, but the Father is the gardener. What role does Jesus say that the gardener plays?**
 - o Answer: The gardener tends to the vine, removing the branches that bear no fruit (i.e., those who do not believe in Jesus) and pruning those that do.
- **Who knows what it means to prune a plant, and why you do it?**
 - o Answer: OK, time for a little gardening 101. To prune a plant is to cut off selected branches. The reason for pruning is to both encourage growth and to shape a plant into a desired form.
- **So, let's connect the dots: If you are a branch that produces fruit, then God will occasionally prune you. What do you think this means?**
 - o Answer: This means that out of His desire to see you grow healthy and reach your potential, God will cut away or lead you to cut away things in your life that are keeping you from perfectly remaining in Christ.
- **What kinds of things might these be?**
 - o Answers will vary. But lead students to see that this could be relationships, misguided plans, bad habits, and so on.

FINALLY, explain to students that pruning is not always, or maybe ever, a pleasant experience. Say:

- **When God shows us areas of our lives that are getting in the way of our commitment to Christ, it's not always easy or fun. And because of our sin nature, it can be especially hard for us to lose something, even if it is something that's not good for us. But, remind students that God is a good and loving gardener. He prunes because He loves! And though it may not be enjoyable, it is essential to our identity. Pruning allows us to stay strongly connected to Jesus, the Vine.**

Make sure there are no questions before transitioning to the Last Word.

The Last Word

- **Goal:** To help students assess where they are in their "connectivity" to Christ, and come up with a plan to get more connected to Him.
- **Set-Up:** Print the "Lesson 3 Last Word Activity Sheet" (located in your Lesson 3 folder). Cut out the cards on the sheet so that each student has one card. Provide something for students to write with. A dry-erase board might also prove helpful, though not essential.

FIRST, explain to students that you're going to wrap up the lesson by helping them think about where they are as it pertains to their connectivity to God, and to help them commit to growing more connected to Him in the near future.

NEXT, remind students that, as you discussed earlier, there are a few key ways that we practice "remaining in Christ." In other words, there are some things we can do to help grow more closely connected to Him. If you have a dry-erase board, ask students if they remember what these ways were from your discussion. Write

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 3/Living As Branches

some form of the following list on the board: Reading and meditating on God's Word; Talking and listening to God in prayer; Praising and worshipping God as individuals and as a Church; Recognizing evidence of God in nature, and any more you may list.

THEN, distribute the cards you have cut out from the "Last Word Activity Sheet" and something to write with. Explain to students that these cards are going to help them follow through on growing closer to God this week.

Say something like:

- **We know that part of our identity is staying connected to God. And we can't stay connected to Him if we don't practice these spiritual habits we just mentioned. If you look at those things we listed on the board, there are some we will be stronger in than others. Take a moment and choose your weakest area of the habits we listed on the board.**

Allow students a moment to do this. You may also want to tell the students the area you could most improve in. Once they have chosen their habit, instruct them to look at their card.

Say:

- **This card represents a scale. Think of the left side of the line as 0, and the right side is 10. The middle would something like a 5. Think about the specific habit you selected as the one you could stand to improve in. Without writing anything on your card, figure out where your current level of engagement is. For instance, if you chose Bible reading as the habit you want to focus on, and you're currently really struggling here, you might be at a 1, or a 3. Make sense?**

Allow students a moment to think about this. Then say:

- **Now, I want you to pick a spot on the scale that would represent progress for you. Maybe if you're a 3 progress would be a 6. Take a moment and think about this. Then, I want you to color in the scale to the point that you have chosen to represent progress.**

NEXT, explain that what they are doing is helping make a reminder for themselves in the upcoming week to grow more connected to God. Reading their Bibles, or praying isn't just another thing to do. It's a way they grow closer to Christ. Instruct them to keep these cards visible this week as a reminder to follow through on being more diligent in seeking Christ through the habit they have chosen to focus on.

FINALLY, encourage them to remember the goal behind this. Remind them that this is who they are as Christ-followers. Staying connected to Christ means producing more fruit in their lives, which in turns mean bringing more glory and honor to God. What an awesome way to live out their identity as Christ-followers

Close in prayer.

- Don't forget to distribute the "Lesson 3" devotions to your students this week. If you're printing them, have them available for students as you wrap up class. If you're texting a link, posting them on Facebook, or some other means of electronic distribution, make sure you inform students of when they will be receiving them.
- Use the Social Media guide to stay in touch with students via text or Twitter, and to encourage them to follow through with reading their devotions.

Jesus and Identity

Lesson 3/Living As Branches

We Want To Hear From You . . .

- Do you have questions about a lesson?
- Something that worked particularly well you want to share?
- Something that didn't work you want to bring up?

We value your feedback! Please do not hesitate to email us with your questions, comments, or concerns, at **feedback@youthministry360.com**.