

Follow Jesus Together

JOHN 15:1-15

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GOAL

Youth identify ways they follow Jesus and how it's easier following Jesus together.

- A Art
- AM Active/Movement
- AT Abstract Thinking
- C Conversation
- CT Concrete Thinking
- D Drama
- G Game
- M Music
- QC Quiet/Contemplative
- S Service
- T Technology
- X Extra Prep

Note: bit.ly addresses are case-sensitive.



PRAYER

Dear God, thank you for those who have journeyed with me in my faith exploration. Inspire the words that come from my mouth that I, too, may inspire and encourage. Amen.

THIS SESSION

Although youth make the commitment to follow Jesus individually, youth do not have to follow Jesus by themselves. This session is about connecting with others who follow Jesus and making a commitment to follow Jesus within a community of believers.

THE BIBLE STORY

John 15:1-15 is Jesus' final "I am" statement in the Gospel of John. The metaphor of vine and branches would have felt familiar to the farmers of Jesus' day. The vine (Jesus) is firm and steady, a source of trust and love. The branches (Jesus' disciples) grow as a result of their connection to the vine. Only together do branches bear fruit and share their produce. Ideally, that fruit is a witness to the love of Jesus. Branches do not grow alone; they grow together and bear fruit together. Therefore, in following Jesus, we necessarily connect to one another.

CONNECTIONS WITH YOUTH

Relationships are essential for youth as they discover who they are in relationship to others and rely on the support of peers for emotional development. Too often, youth are encouraged to compete and be the very best in the group in order to succeed. Christian community and mutual support can take some of this pressure off. Youth can practice recognizing their own skills and talents as *fruits* or gifts from God. Because God loves the world, God shares that love through the fruit that people give to one another. Youth should practice celebrating their own gifts.

However, connection to the vine and branches is vital for us to be fruitful. Youth also learn to celebrate the gifts of others. Ideally, youth also find comfort in knowing that they do not follow Jesus alone. Our community is not only a gift from God to us; it is also an expectation of all disciples to be a part of that community.

SESSION PREPARATION

- Consider texting or reaching out via social media to each of the youth who participated in the last session or youth who are likely to participate in this session to remind them that God loves them and wants them to follow Jesus. You might ask if they have any questions, thoughts, or ideas after the last session that they'd like to share/ask.
- If the "I will follow Jesus" sign and "feet" have come down since the last session, put them back on the wall for the opening and closing activities.

GETTING STARTED

- Colorful construction paper
- Scissors

PREPARING FOR CLOSING ACTIVITY A C

Before the session, set out colorful construction paper and scissors on a table. Welcome youth as they arrive and invite them to cut out leaf shapes. You will need at least one leaf per person with a few extra leaves. Leaves need to be at least the size of an adult fist, large enough that the youth can write a name on them.

While they cut leaves, start casual conversations to check in. If you communicated with youth via text or social media during the week, check to see if they received your message. After a few minutes, collect leaves, setting them aside to use at the end of the session. As you clean up, inform the youth that today we'll explore how we continue on our journey to follow Jesus individually and together.



INTRODUCING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options

- Copies of the lyrics for “Count on Me” by Bruno Mars
- Internet-connected device

COUNT ON ME M C



Before the session, search for the lyrics for “Count on Me” by Bruno Mars on the internet and print them for participants.

Distribute copies of the lyrics to “Count on Me” and show the official music video (bit.ly/FMCountOnMe, 3:13). This video features Mars playing and interacting with children.

Lead a brief discussion using these questions:

- ➔ As you heard this song, who do you imagine is the speaker? And to whom is he singing?
- ➔ In what ways does the singer promise to “be there” for someone else?
- ➔ Who can you imagine singing that song for you?
- ➔ Who can you imagine singing that song to?
- ➔ How might this song apply to your faith journey?

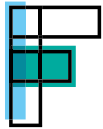
Conclude these questions by asking the youth to think about the roles that others play in our faith journey.

AFFIRMATION AM

This game is similar to hot and cold, using “applause” and “silence” to represent “hot” and “cold.” Ask for a youth volunteer to step out of the room. While they are absent, ask the group to choose a location in the room and to choose an action that someone might do in that location (for example, jumping jacks by the window). Bring the volunteer back into the room and instruct them that they are to determine the location and action that the group picked for them. As the volunteer gets closer to the location or begins to do the action, other youth begin clapping. For example, if a youth raises their arms and the action is to do jumping jacks, they might receive a smattering of claps. Louder and faster claps should indicate the volunteer

is moving or doing something correctly. When the volunteer demonstrates the chosen action in the chosen location, everyone should be applauding enthusiastically.

Allow multiple volunteers to play if time allows. End by noting that accomplishing the task in the activity is possible only with the help of others in the room.



FINDING THE PRACTICE IN THE BIBLE

Choose one or both options.

GROWING A VINE A

Tell youth that Jesus often taught using objects people would recognize to symbolize concepts or ideas. In today's story, he uses the parts of a grapevine to explain how we relate to one another and to him. Read John 15:1–11 aloud to the group and then pass out Resource Page 1. Give youth time to complete the page (coloring it, if they like) and share their answers with one another.

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- Bible
 - Copy of Resource Page 1 for each participant
 - Colored pencils

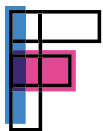
READING AND ANSWERING AT C



Verse 2 of the text is especially difficult as God removes branches. If youth have questions about that verse, invite them to interpret it together while reminding them that the passage is about love and community.

Read John 15:1–15 aloud to the group and then discuss some of the following questions:

- ➔ What do you think it means that Jesus is the “true vine”?
- ➔ What skills and gifts do you believe God has given you? What skills and gifts has God given to others in the room? How do we use these skills and gifts to “bear much fruit”?
- ➔ Why does Jesus call his followers “branches”?
- ➔ Are certain branches more important than others on this vine? Why or why not?
- ➔ How do we “abide in Jesus”?



FINDING THE PRACTICE THEN AND NOW

Choose one or both options.

HARRY POTTER AND DOBBY T C

Show youth the clip from *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets* where Harry tricks Lucius Malfoy into granting freedom to Dobby, the house elf (bit.ly/FMDobbyIsAFreeElf, 2:35). If youth are unfamiliar with the story, explain to them that house elves like Dobby, while powerful magicians, have been enslaved as servants in the Harry Potter universe.

Read John 15:12–15. Discuss some or all of these questions:

- ➔ What are the differences in how Lucius and Harry treat Dobby?

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- Internet-connected device

- Where in this scene does a servant become a friend?
- Why does Harry feel the need to free Dobby?
- Who was willing to lay down their life for another in this scene?
- Why does Jesus call those who follow *friends* instead of *servants*?

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- Copies of church publications
 - Newsprint
 - Marker

BEING CHURCH TOGETHER

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Pass out copies of church publications that contain information about group activities in your worshiping community. These may include old church bulletins or newsletters. You might also direct youth to church social media or websites on their smart devices. Ask youth to look for examples of groups within the church that are following Jesus together.

As youth find ways that your church is following as community, make a list on newsprint. After making this list, invite youth to pick out something on the list that they've never tried before and that they might consider trying. Also, ask youth to think about areas of the church ministry they might like to form a community around. If they have energy and time, brainstorm ways to form additional small-group communities at the church.



PRACTICING THE PRACTICE

Choose one or both options.

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- Pens
 - Notecards

WRITING A NOTE

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Have some ideas for who youth might write a letter to if they cannot think of someone.

Ask youth to think about someone who needs encouragement. It might be someone in your congregation or someone at their school. Have youth write a note to them using phrases such as “you are never alone” or “I am praying for you.” Be sure you have enough information about the recipient of the letters to find an address (through your church directory or by reaching out to the youth family). Mail the letters after the session.

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- Poster board
 - Markers

PROTESTING

A AM



If you do this activity outside, it may be best to do it last.

Invite youth to select a cause that is important to them (e.g., Black Lives Matter, LGBTQ+ rights, climate change) and make protest signs for that cause. They may look on their smartphones for design inspiration. While youth are making signs, encourage them to think about how much easier it is to protest and raise awareness around a particular issue with other youth at their church than it would be alone.

Once youth make the signs, engage in a protest to raise awareness about that issue. Following are some ways to conduct a protest with your group:

- Walk around your building, showing your signs to others in the building.
- Go for a short walk around the neighborhood, holding up the signs.
- Take pictures of your youth holding the signs and post them on social media later with a hashtag agreed upon by the youth. Check your church's policy about posting pictures of youth online.

- Post signs in a public place at the church where they can stay for a week or more.
- Speak to the pastor about including them in worship.



FOLLOWING JESUS

THE JOURNEY

Gather participants into a semicircle facing the sign you posted before the first session, which says, “I will follow Jesus.”

Pass out the leaves created at the beginning of the session and markers. As you do so, remind the youth that they are not on this journey of following Jesus alone. Throughout our lives, God sends mentors, guides, peers, and friends to journey with us. Have youth write the name of one of those people who travel on their faith journey with them. If youth want to write multiple names on one leaf or take an extra leaf because they have more than one person who journeys with them, that’s fine.

After participants write the name on their leaves, take up their markers. Then call each by name (one at a time) and give them a piece of tape to secure their leaf on the wall. As they do so, invite them to offer a prayer to God. The prayer may be as simple as “Thank you, God, for (*Name*)” or it may be longer such as “Thank you, God, for (*Name*), who always listens to me and helps me work through my problems.”

When all have posted their leaves and said their prayers, say “Amen” for the group.

- Leaves created in “Getting Started”
- Markers
- Wall-safe tape

On each branch, write the name of someone who has been influential in your journey of faith. Beside their name, write one skill or gift that they have.



“Abide in me as I abide in you. Just as the branch cannot bear fruit by itself unless it abides in the vine, neither can you unless you abide in me. I am the vine, you are the branches.” (John 15:4–5a)