

# Series: Who is Who?

## Lesson 4—The Vine and the Branches

### OVERVIEW

Bible Passages: 1 Samuel 1:1-18

Key Verse: John 15:8—“I am the vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing.”

Important Note: This lesson is intended to be taught outside.

### BEFORE CLASS

**Preparation:** *Your preparation will determine the direction your class will go.*

- Consider what the idea of what God being the gardener, Jesus being the vine, and you being a branch means.
- Consider what it means for you “remain” in Christ and He in you.
- Consider what Jesus meant when He said, “apart from me you can do nothing.”
- Study and prepare your lesson so that you are familiar with the teaching outline.
- Use the Contact 1-2-3 system to the right to follow up on students who have recently missed Sunday School.
- Pray for each student by name.

### CONTACT 1-2-3 SYSTEM

*The first time a student is absent, give them a call. Following the second absence, send them a postcard. The third week they are absent, pay them a visit.*

*Think about it: What does it say to a student when they miss multiple weeks in a row and are never contacted? It says, “It really doesn’t matter if you’re here or not.”*

*Small things communicate great messages. Let the three “small” things above communicate that you care and miss your students when they are absent.*

### OPENING ACTIVITY

#### Discussion

- *What do you think is the most destructive weapon ever made? (The tongue has caused more damage than all other weapons. There’s not a person in this room, nor in this world, that at some time hasn’t been hurt by it.)*
- *In what ways can a tongue hurt you? (It can gossip, lie, insult, complain, abuse, by boasting, etc.)*

- *What are some things that have been said to you or about you that personally hurt you? (Let your students share some stories.)*

SAY: Today we're going to look at the power of the tongue and how God wants you to use your tongue to help and not hurt.

## **BIBLE LESSON**

**Have students turn in their Bibles to James 3:1-12**

While turning there, SAY:

The Book of James is the wisdom book of the New Testament. If you want advice on practical day-to-day living, James is the book for you.

*Choose a volunteer to read—James 3:1-2*

- *What did James say—If a person can control his tongue, he can control what? (His whole body.)*

SAY: Nothing seems to trip a believer more than a dangling tongue. Spiritual maturity required a tamed tongue.

- ***Answer these questions to yourself:***

*(1) Do you consider yourself to be a spiritually mature Christian?*

*(2) Do you have a tamed tongue—In other words is your daily speech free from talking bad about other people and situations, from gossiping, from any form of deceit or malice or insult or abuse. Is your speech negative or is it seasoned with the grace of God so that your words bless those who hear you.*

SAY: Spiritual maturity requires a tamed tongue. Unfortunately our churches are full of people who consider themselves to be spiritually mature, but when they talk, their speech reveals them to be spiritual babes who claim to be spiritually grown but have little godly control over what they say. One of the greatest things that holds churches and ministries back today are that these people are put into positions of leadership because they consider themselves to be mature when they are not. As a result they talk bad about people in the church, they gossip, insult, grumble, stir up strife and do all sorts of evil with their mouths, many times without even realizing the damage they are doing or the judgment they will receive.

- *How does this make you feel about perhaps someday teaching or leading others? (Hesitant? Unsure? Some of you taught last week in Bible School and teaching whether in a role like VBS or as a teacher, leader, or sponsor elsewhere in the church is a privilege that should only be given to those who are spiritually mature and in love with Christ. It's a privilege that comes with the responsibility of being a living example of everything the Bible teaches.)*

*Choose a volunteer to read —James 3:3-5*

- *What are the three examples that James uses to describe the tongue?* (bits that turn grown horses, small rudders that guide large ships, and a small spark that can consume an entire forest.)
- *What is the point behind these illustrations?* (The tongue is small but powerful. Your body and life will follow your tongue—it will guide you and can bring great harm and destruction.)

Choose a volunteer to read —James 3:6

SAY: James makes the point that tongue is not only powerful but perverse. It is small and influential but, worse by far, it can be satanic and infectious.

- *How are things that are said spread like a fire?* (There's an old saying, "Good news travels fast, but bad news travels faster.")
- *When someone tells you some bit of juicy information, what's the first thing you want to do with it?* (Spread it to others. Gossip and bad talk is like a cancer that spreads quickly and damages everything it touches.)
- *How would you define gossip?* (Gossip originated from an Old English word *godsibb*, or *god*, meaning "God" plus *sib*, meaning "kinsman" or close "relation," from which we get the word *sibling*. *Godsibb* wasn't directly referencing God but something that God gives.<sup>2</sup> For example, *Godspeed* meant "prosperous journey," a *Godsend* was something "unexpected," not directly referring to God but something He gives. *Godsibb*, therefore, refers to a closeness, like family, that God gives among a group. In other words, gossip originally referred to a tight-knit group, something that is good, something that God gave—a closeness among friends. But over time, this word that originally referred to something good became something bad.
- *Why do you think the meaning of the word gossip (godsibb) changed?* (Because what did close-knit groups of friends become known for: For talking bad about others and using their tongues to harm and damage others, especially those who weren't a part of their group. This is also the reason that "gossip" can both refer to a person—i.e., "She's a gossip"—as well as an act. Thus, *godsibb*, which originally meant a closeness that God gives, evolved into the word gossip which is defined as "a person who habitually reveals personal or sensational facts about others; a rumor or report of an intimate nature."<sup>3</sup>
- *If you are a part of a close-knit group of friends, how can you protect against gossip?*

SAY: Here are some suggestions: If someone comes to you with juicy information, *did they see it themselves or did they hear about it from another?* If they are not an eye-witness, they are a false witness and it is gossip and evil if they pass along the information to you, and it is just as wrong and evil if you provide an ear for their sin.

- *So once they begin talking, this is what you do:* Say, “Wait a minute. Is this something you saw yourself or just heard about?” If they didn’t see it themselves, tell them that you don’t need to know it and they don’t need to be passing it along to anyone else. A true friend who is godly and in a growing relationship with Christ will understand and receive your correction. If your friend is not godly or a growing believer, you may need to question how close a friendship you should have with him or her.
- *If they saw it themselves, your next question should be:* “Why is this something that I need to know?” In other words, what’s the motive or purpose behind what they are saying? It may be information regarding a situation you need to know; they might be needing advice; etc. But, if their motive is purely to talk bad about someone or to pass along chatty information, then you need to tell them, either gently or firmly, that you won’t be a part of it.
- *Be careful: Many gossips disguise their information by saying,* “We need to be in prayer for...” when their purpose is not prayer and the work of God but the passing of negative information.
- *How to identify a gossip:*
  - Most gossips begin by saying, “You won’t believe what I heard...” Or, “You’re not going to believe this,” etc.
  - Most gossips come to you excited, even about the most disturbing information. Why? Because they derive a perverse pleasure from sharing negative information.
  - Most gossips continually talk negative about people behind their backs, even little one liners such as, “I can’t believe she wore that dress,” etc. This is the same negative attitude that gives birth to their desires to gossip.
  - Most gossips are very insecure about themselves: That’s the reason they talk bad about others—to feel better about themselves. This is also the reason that many gossips will respond negatively to correction and will many times find other friends if you are not willing to listen to them. The advantage to this is, as a godly growing follower of Christ, it is best not to be close friends with a gossip.
  - Being best friends with a gossip will almost always hinder your walk with God. Their desire to talk bad about people will become a weight that holds you back and a hindrance instead of an encouragement to closely .

A few other things to know about Gossip:

- *Gossip is never positive.* It is always negative information. It’s okay to pass along good information you hear about others.
- *Gossip is never profitable.* It always destroys and deeply affects both the talker and the listener.
- *Gossip is contagious.* Once you hear gossip, you will be tempted to share it with others.
- *Gossip is always sin.* In the end God will judge the motives of the heart.
- *Gossip reveals inward wickedness.* Jesus said that what comes out of your mouth shows what is in your heart.

- *Gossip brings consequences.* Sin always brings consequences both in your relationship with others and in your relationship with God.
- *God will judge gossip.* You will be held accountable for how you lived and what you did.

In other words, what's the motive or purpose behind what they are saying? It may be information regarding a situation you need to know; they might be needing advice; etc. But, if their motive is purely to talk bad about someone or to pass along chatty information, then you need to tell them, either gently or firmly, that you won't be a part of it.

#### **ILLUSTRATION:**

Picture that you're walking along one day and you come across four baskets. You pick up the first basket and don't see any fruit. Some of the branches didn't bear a single grape. Jesus had these branches in mind when he said, "Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit..." (verse 2).

You step over a row and peek into the second basket. You see several healthy clusters of grapes in the bottom. Some branches, then, are not barren. You can find grapes on them if you look hard enough. Jesus described this branch as one that "bears fruit" (verse 2). Still, there's not much to get excited about here. In fact as you look at these two baskets you begin to wonder about the skill of the gardener and the potential of this hillside.

The next row over reassures you. You see a basket more than half full of plump, juicy grapes. You'd be proud to walk out of the vineyard with this basket. In Jesus' illustration, this branch bears "more fruit" (verse 2).

Finally, though, your eyes land on the last basket in the row—the basket of your dreams. You immediately notice that both the size and the amount of the grapes are extraordinary. The fourth basket overflows with the biggest, most desirable grapes you've ever seen. You never knew that one branch could produce so much. Jesus' description for this branch is that it "bears much fruit" (verse 5).

**SAY:** Each of the baskets is producing a different level of abundance. Now let's consider your life in regards to the two definitions of "fruit."

- ***When you consider how many people you have personally led to Christ, which basket would your life represent (1) A basket with no fruit; (2) a basket with some fruit; (3) a basket with more fruit; (4) Or a basket with much fruit?***
- ***When you consider how your lifestyle gives honor and glory to God, which basket would your life represent (1) A basket with no fruit; (2) a basket with some fruit; (3) a basket with more fruit; (4) Or a basket with much fruit?***
- ***Overall, how much fruit has your life produced—none, very little, more, or is your life overflowing with fruit?***

- *Why do you feel this way?*
- *Are you happy with this evaluation and if not, what needs to change in order for your life to produce an abundance of fruit?*
- **KEY QUESTION:** *If Jesus chose us for abundance, expects abundance, and created us to deeply desire it, how can we ever find fulfillment in a half-empty basket?*  
(Not experiencing an abundance in Christ, you will only exist with cheap satisfaction in life as you live for only a shadow or shell of what you were created for.)

## LESSON ACTIVITY

### Illustration

*Give each person in your class a moment to walk around and pull up a weed or break off a small branch from a tree and bring it back to the group.*

- *What is going to happen to the branch or weed you have in your hand?* (You have sentenced it to death by breaking it off from its life-source.)
- *How is this similar to what sin does in a Christian's life?*
- *How would you describe your life as it relates to a living plant or vine—are you connected to the life source or do you feel separated and cut off from it?*
- *How often would you say that you truly experience the presence of God in your daily life? What might this say about your “connection” as a branch to the vine?*

## KEY VERSE

*Choose a volunteer—To Read John 15:2*

- *What do you think this verse means?*
- *A moment ago, if you answered that you are a “basket with no fruit” what does this say about you? What does this mean?*

SAY: Many people misunderstand verse two because many Bible translations don't do justice to what the word for “cut off, lift up, or remove” actually means. Here's an example:

***Name some things you love*** (i.e., your mom, your dog, ice cream, etc.)

SAY: The English language only has one word for love, even though we understand that there are differing degrees of it. Greek, however, which is the language in which most of the New Testament was written in, is a much more descriptive language and has four words that describe different kinds of love. Similarly, the word used here in verse two that is many times translated

as “cut off or remove” means so much more. It can mean to “take away” or “take up” or “lift up” or “to remove by carrying.”

*Examples:*

This is the word used when the disciples “took up” twelve baskets of food after Jesus fed the five thousand (Matt. 14:20), or when Simon was forced to “bear” Christ’s cross (Matt. 27:32), or when John the Baptist called Jesus the Lamb of God who “takes away” the sin of the world (John 1:29).

SAY: So this word carries the idea that the gardener is lifting up the vine to remove it, but why? Because new branches of a vine have a tendency to trail down and grow along the ground but they can’t bear fruit down there. Their branches get coated in dust. When it rains, they get muddy and mildewed. The branch becomes sick and useless. But the gardener doesn’t hack it off. Instead, he *lifts it up to remove it* from the dirt that it might be cleaned and eventually become productive. This idea also gives a clearer understanding of verse 3.

**Choose a volunteer—To Read John 15:3**

- *Would you say that your life is clean?*
- *What did Jesus say had made the disciples clean? (The word He had spoken to them.)*
- *How often do you spend time putting God’s Word in your life? How might this relate to how fruitful your life is?*

**Choose a volunteer—To Read John 15:4**

SAY: You will only be as fruitful as your connection to Christ is strong. That is the reason it is so important for you spend one-on-one, daily time with Christ, so that you might “remain” connect to Him.

- *On a scale of 1 to 10, how strong is your “connection” to Christ?*
- *Are there things in your life that might need to be removed (or pruned away, to use a gardener’s term) for you to have a stronger relationship with Christ? (God, like a gardener, continually prunes, that the branch may continue to grow and become more productive.)*

**Choose a volunteer—To Read John 15:5-8**

- *What does it mean to “remain” or “abide” in Christ? (Your abode is where you live—Do you live in Christ? Abiding doesn’t measure how much you know about your*  
**Copyright three-thirty ministries, 2008 • [www.threethirtyministries.org](http://www.threethirtyministries.org)**

faith or your Bible. In abiding, you seek, long for, thirst for, wait for, see, know, love, hear and respond to...*a person*. More abiding means more of God in your life, more of Him in your activities, thoughts, and desires.)

● *How many of you are hot right now? Are you thirsty? How much motivation would you need to go inside?*

● *Likewise, are you “spiritually hot” right now? Are you thirsty for Christ? If not, what will it take to motivate you to move from where you are to where you need to be in a growing relationship with Christ?*

SAY: You could sit here all day in the sun but you won’t because you’re not happy here. Likewise, you won’t grow deeper with Christ until you become unhappy with where you are spiritually. Many people are content to wither and waste away becoming spiritually useless because they are not willing to move from where they are. They don’t want to be lifted from the filth of the world or pruned back to become more like Christ. They are content. Right now, physically, you’re not content because you’re used to air conditioning—you’re used to being inside, not having Sunday School on the lawn. In the same way, don’t stay content with where you are spiritually. Continue to fall more deeply in love with Jesus, remain in Him, grow and bear much fruit.

## WRAP IT UP

### Prayer Time

List prayer requests below and on the back of this page and pray for your students throughout the week. *Ask if any of your students want to pray today.*

<sup>1</sup>Much of this lesson is based on following commentary: , *Secrets of the Vine* (Sisters, OR: Multnomah Publishers, 2001).



<sup>2</sup>Websters, ed., Famous Last Words (New York: Workman Publishing, 2003), 540

<sup>3</sup>Ibid.