

Day 1

Freed to Serve

Focus Question

What does it mean to be a friend of Jesus?

Theme Statement

Jesus chooses us as his friends and asks us to serve just as he does.

Objectives

This Bible study will help campers and their leaders:

- understand the connection between the vine and branches.
- explore the meaning of being a friend and the fact that Jesus chooses us as his friend.
- identify ways we can “bear fruit” and be a servant.

Bible Text

John 15:1-17 (Freed to Serve)

Key Verse

“I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything that I have heard from my Father.” John 15:15

Materials

Bible, three bean bags or tennis balls (two alike and one that is a different color or marked so that it is different), a plant with a vine/stem and several branches, light colored cardstock or heavy paper cut into book mark size, markers or color pencils, paper punch, yarn or string, scissors, clear contact paper (optional).

Gather

Bible study may be a new concept for many of the campers. Day 1 will set the stage for the rest of your week. Be prepared, and create an atmosphere that will work to your advantage as a teacher. Choose a space off the main track for Bible study time. It will help campers stay focused and make discussion easier.

We’re Connected

You’ll need the three beanbags and an open space. Invite campers to sit a circle. This activity will help campers learn names and also show that we are all connected like the vine and branches and as friends.

Go around the circle and have each person clearly state his or her name. Make sure everyone can hear each name. Repeat any names that are unusual or difficult to pronounce. Go around again stating names. Then go around the circle backwards.

You should have the beanbags to start. Pick out a camper to whom you are going to toss the beanbag. Explain you are tossing it underhand, not pitching it at each other. Say, “Hi, [camper’s name].” And then toss the beanbag to the camper. When they catch it, the camper says, “Thank you [your name].” They pick out a player to whom they will throw the beanbag and follow the same routine. Continue till everyone is included. Note: The

beanbag should go to a new person each time, and when it has made it to everyone, it comes back to you. Have campers remember to whom they tossed the beanbag. Try it again. The beanbag needs to follow the same path. This time add the other two beanbags to the game. Help them out when it gets too confusing. If the group is ready for more of a challenge, have the two matching beanbags go around the circle in a forward motion and the odd beanbag backwards.

Gather all the beanbags. Come together as a group, and sit down to talk about the activity.

- What would happen if we told (name a camper) that he/she could not play? (*The beanbag would fall to the ground, and the game would come to a halt.*)
- Could we still play the game? How? (*We could cover for them or re-group and play without them, but it would not be the same with the person missing.*)
- This game got kind of confusing/hard. What made it difficult? (*When the beanbags crossed in the middle, someone had more than one beanbag. Remembering to whom to throw it was difficult.*)
- What did we do so that we could still play? (*We helped each other.*)

By staying connected we were able to play the game and get to know each other a little better so that we could become better friends. Turn to a person sitting next to each side, shake their hand, call them by name, and thank them for playing the beanbag game.

Close this activity with a prayer.

Dear God, We give you thanks for new friends, day camp, and this time together. Help us be connected as friends this week, making sure everyone is included and helping each other. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Word

The Bible can be a bit complicated for many lower elementary age campers, so be sure you read the lesson as though you were reading a story during story time at the library. Talk through the story as you read it. Identify who is speaking and who the main characters are.

Vines and Branches

Go to an outdoor area where grape vines, trees, or other plants grow. If that is not possible, show the campers the plant you brought. Have the campers find the vine/trunk/stem of the plant. Invite them to examine how many different ways that the branches grow. No two branches are the same. Ask what the plant produces. (*Fruit, leaves, flowers*).

Tell the campers that Jesus used the grape vine to help us understand our relationship with God. The grape vine is an interesting plant. It has a big vine and lots of branches that grow out from the vine. It is kind of like a tree with a big trunk and lots of branches. It is all connected. When you cut a branch off the vine, the branch dies because it cannot get food and water to live on. If the branches die, the plant cannot produce fruit. Grape vines produce what? (*Grapes*). Are all grapes alike? (*No*) Are all people alike? (*Of course not!*)

Read John 15:1-11. Read it like a story, slowly and deliberately. Ask the campers to listen carefully and to notice what represents God (*The vinegrower*), Jesus (*The vine*), and us (*The branches*).

Ask for volunteers, or appoint campers, to act out the vine and branch relationship. You need at least one vine, several branches, the sun, rain, soil and grapes. Have the campers

help you organize the skit. Start with the seed, soil, sun, and rain and grow a vine that then branches out and produces grapes. Add actors to represent the things that keep the fruit from growing, such as birds who eat the grapes, bugs, too much rain, and so on. Be sure to thank all the campers who served as actors.

The Fruit of Friendship

Sit in a circle, and ask a volunteer to read John 15:14. Give the campers an opportunity to talk about what it means to have Jesus for a friend. Then explain that to be Jesus' friend is to be like the branches connected to the vine. Jesus wants us to follow his command—to bear fruit. Stand in the middle of the circle, and tell the campers that you are going to read a few verses that help us understand what kind of fruit we are to bear. Challenge the campers to listen carefully for the word *love* or *loved*. Each time they hear the word they are to jump up, shout “Love one another,” and then sit down again. Practice the shout a few times, and then read John 15:8-17. Pause briefly each time the word *love* or *loved* is used so that the campers have time to jump up, shout, and sit again.

Close this section with this litany:

L: God loves us.

C: Love one another!

L: Jesus loves us.

C: Love one another!

L: Jesus is our friend.

C: Love one another!

L: Jesus is the vine; we are the branches.

C: Love one another!

L: We bear fruit.

C: Love one another!

L: Amen.

Serve

Branches and Vine Bookmarks

God is the vinegrower. God is the creator of all. Jesus is the vine. When we are baptized, we become connected to the vine. Our baptism makes us part of God's family, and we are united with God—we are friends of Jesus.

We are connected to Jesus the vine and need to stay connected. Have campers draw their own grape vine or tree on their bookmark. Have each camper draw his or her picture (or write his or her name) on one of the branches. Punch a hole at one end, and string the yarn through the hole. Optional: Cover each bookmark with contact paper.

If campers have a Bible with them, have them mark John 15:1-17. If not, encourage them to take the bookmark home, and put it in a Bible when they get home.

Freed to Serve

We are called to be fruit. Much Fruit! We are to “feed” or serve other people. Invite campers to share ways that they serve and care for others. Give everyone time to think of a way that they can serve. Then have campers share by saying,

“Freed to serve, I will bear fruit by _____.” Share as a large group or if you have enough leaders break into several smaller groups to allow for a stronger affirmation of

their plans to serve.

If time allows, talk about other ways that you can serve and ways that your friends can serve. How can we encourage others to serve?

Review

Jesus says, "I am the vine, you are the _____." (*branches*)

We are to be _____ for others. (*fruit*)

Jesus calls us _____. (*Friend*)

We are _____ to serve. (*freed*)

Turn to your neighbor, gently pat them on the back, and say, "Good job, friend."

I Choose You

Can you make someone be your friend? (*No*)

How do you get to be friends with someone?

What makes for a good friend?

Closing Prayer

End the Bible study by repeating the litany from the Word section of this study.

L: God loves us.

C: Love one another!

L: Jesus loves us.

C: Love one another!

L: Jesus is our friend.

C: Love one another!

L: Jesus is the vine; we are the branches.

C: Love one another!

L: We bear fruit.

C: Love one another!

L: Amen

Creative Activities

Autograph Book

Materials: Paper, pencils, markers or crayons, stapler and staples.

Create an autograph book by folding sheets of paper in half and stapling along the spine.

Use markers or crayons to decorate the books. Encourage campers to get autographs from the friends they have at camp. Campers may also choose to share contact information with their friends.

Anklets

Materials: Scissors, embroidery floss or crochet thread, 1 button per person, masking tape.

Cut eight to ten 3-foot (1 m) lengths of embroidery thread for each camper. Have each camper arrange his or her thread so that the ends match up. At one end of the bunch, tie a loop that's slightly bigger than the button, and tape the threads to a stationary surface. Separate one thread from the rest. Wrap it around the bunch, then wrap it up over itself, and pull it taut. Have the campers continue wrapping and knotting the same strand around the bunch until they want to change colors. Separate a new thread from the group, and

blend the last one back in. They can change colors as often as they want. When near the end, tie a tight overhand knot. Thread the loose ends through the buttonholes, tie them in a knot, and trim off any excess.

Games

Grapes on the Vine

Materials: A long heavy piece of green yarn, a list of simple questions.

Have campers sit in a circle. Pretend the green yarn is a grapevine. When you answer a question correctly, you become a grape on the grapevine. If you do not answer it correctly, you stay put and wait for another turn. Ask questions that campers can easily answer. The newest addition to the vine gets to pick the next player. Play until everyone is on the vine.

Twist and Shout

Materials: Music (singing, a guitar playing, a CD).

Assign each camper a partner. Have one camper from each pair form an inside circle. The others will form an outside circle. When the music starts (singing, guitar music, a CD playing), the inner circle moves to the right, and the outside circle, to the left. When the music stops, the campers will scramble to find their partner. Instruct campers to sit down, once the pairs are together. Find a new partner and play again. The goal is make new friends and learn to work together.

Devotions

Squeeze Prayer

Talk about prayer before you do this activity. Prayer is a way we stay connected to God, and a squeeze prayer lets us physically be connected as we pray. When we end a prayer, we say "Amen." Amen means "Let it be so." We are saying, "Yes, God this is what we want." And we are making a commitment to do our best to make the prayer come true.

Invite the campers to make a circle and hold hands with the people next to them. Or have them make a fist and stand fist to fist in the circle. Explain how a squeeze prayer works. Have a group leader open, and when the leader is done, the leader pass the prayer to the next person by either squeezing his or her hand or bumping fists. Each person adds a prayer, in this case a prayer with the name of someone whom they will serve or a project they will do as a servant. After the prayer has been passed around the circle, the first person closes. Everyone joins in saying "Amen."

Friendship Chain

Materials: Paper strips of various colors 6 to 8.5 inches (15 to 21.5 cm), tape or stapler, pencils or markers.

Have each person write his or her name on a piece of paper. We are united here as God's children. Together we are going to learn about God, grow in our faith, laugh, sing, and just enjoy being friends. That means we have to work together as a group.

Create a friendship chain. Make a loop with one of the strips by connecting the two ends. Pass a second strip through the loop, and connect the two ends. Continue until all the strips are a part of the chain.

Read Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Together as friends we can help support each other and make this a really great week. Close with a prayer about working together.