

BIG IDEA

Jesus is always with us.

BIBLE

John 15:16; 1 John 4:12-15; Galatians 5:22-25

WHAT? *What are we talking about today?*

ACTIVITY | “Who Dis?”

- Welcome back to our series *I Am*, where we discuss the importance of knowing who Jesus says he is in his own words and why that matters to us today.
- I don't know about you, but sometimes I get a new phone and forget to update my contacts. No matter how often someone texts me and says they are who they say they are, I won't know that until I hear their voice or see them on a video call. Now imagine some of the most famous musicians in the world trying to call you, but all you have to go off is the song that plays on their ringtone when they call.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, you need to choose five to ten popular songs appropriate for your group before your program. To play, choose two to four contestants to play against each other. Start playing a song softly while contestants guess who the artists are, then turn it up when the answer is revealed so everyone can dance. Contestants can shout their answers as they think of them. The first contestant to guess the correct answer gets the point. The contestant with the most points at the end wins!*
- Sometimes the best way to know who someone is is to hear their voice. But sometimes, that may not be possible. Maybe they are not in a spot to do that. Or perhaps you don't feel like you are on the best speaking terms.
- What should we do when that is happening between us and God? Sometimes God seems distant, impersonal, or like someone, we can't connect with. Sometimes we may even wonder if God is even there.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups!*
 - **Fill in this blank I AM statement: “I AM consistently _____.”**
 - **Have you ever been distant from someone you care about? How did you handle that?**

VIDEO | A Clip of A Plant Wave

- Sometimes we don't communicate well with others because we are not on good terms or we don't know where to start. Or maybe you end up talking to something that actually can't respond – like a plant! But here is the thing, when it comes to plants, scientists may have solved this problem.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video [like this](#) (0:32–1:46) of a device that looks at electronic signals from plants and turns them into music. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*

- Okay, I know that is not the same as having a conversation, but plants making music may be as close as we ever get to talking with nature.
- Interestingly enough, plants must be connected to a source that gives them life. Plants need to have water flowing into them in order to make the music.

POLL | What A Plant Needs

- Here's the thing . . . for some of us, taking care of plants is hard! For others, not so much.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, show an image of a Bonsai Tree [like this one](#) from Unsplash. These images are free for you to use under the [Unsplash license](#). As you show this picture, ask your students to respond to the following questions by raising their hands. Ask a few students why they gave the answer they did.*
 - **Have you ever had a plant and not had the greenest thumb?**
 - **Have you ever had a plant that ended up thriving?**
- All plants need these seven things: room to grow, the right temperature, light, water, air, nutrients, and time. Some plants can last pretty long on their own –but others truly need someone *with* them.
- Take bonsai trees, for instance. They are delicate plants that need more special care. They will not last if someone isn't *with* them. They need someone to trim and water them every day. Left alone, a bonsai will get distorted, dry, and eventually die.
- We are similar to a bonsai, and God is our caretaker. Honestly, sometimes, we may feel dry and misshapen because God seems distant and impersonal, like someone we can't connect with. Jesus tells us about a way to stay close to God all the time.

SO WHAT? Why does it matter to God and to us?

SCRIPTURE | John 15:1–8

- In Jesus' day, people connected with agriculture and gardening. Throughout the Bible, there are plenty of references to God's people being a plant that was cared for by the master gardener.
- In Israel, where Jesus lived with his family and friends, a vineyard was a symbol God gave the people of Israel to understand themselves.
- One time, Jesus was teaching his followers and told them a parable using the vine as a symbol.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read John 15:1–8.*
- The unique spin Jesus brings to this metaphor is that he is the vine everyone must connect with to receive what they need to survive. When previous biblical writers used this metaphor, they would refer to the people of Israel as a vineyard (like in Isaiah 5:1–7 and Psalm 80:7–15). Jesus was expanding that definition around himself.
- He said that everyone, including the people of Israel, could be connected to Jesus and receive what they need. The branches are nourished through his care and love as we are connected to the vine.
- But unlike a typical branch, which has no choice, we can stay connected to the vine and bear fruit. Jesus is always with us, longing for us to remain connected to him and the Father. It is our choice to disconnect, and according to Jesus, being disconnected can have disastrous consequences.

OBJECT LESSON | Grapevine

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this object lesson, you'll need to purchase or borrow a grapevine from a local plant shop (or you can order one from [Amazon](#)) and a table to set it on. Before your program, set the grapevine on the table to reference while you teach.*
- Check out this grapevine. Jesus said, "I am the true vine," and said we should always stay connected to him like one of these branches to the stock of this vine.

- When we are connected to him, we thrive because we're in the gardener's care. When Jesus instructs us to 'remain in him,' he's asking us to continue living the way Jesus has demonstrated – a life of prayer, rest, love, compassion, grace, and making wrong things right.
- The job of the branches is to stay connected to the vine. If it doesn't, it will simply dry up – but if the branches remain connected, they will thrive!

SCRIPTURE | 1 John 4:12–15

- Jesus knew that we would need some help to remain connected to him, so he left his presence in the Holy Spirit to help us stay to remain in him and lead us into closer friendship.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *Read 1 John 4:12–15.*
- The Holy Spirit is the active presence of God in the world. The Spirit lives in every one of us who has decided to follow Jesus to remind and encourage us to remain connected to Jesus and live as he did in the world.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ★ **What does it mean for God to be consistent in your life? Is that something you have thought or cared about? Why or why not?**
 - **Why do you think Jesus compared our connection to him to a branch connected to a vine?**

VIDEO | A Clip of The Wind Through The Trees

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As a teaching tool, play a short clip from a video like [this one](#) of wind blowing through the trees playing in the background as you teach. For more information on how to legally use copyrighted material for educational purposes, [read this!](#)*
- One of the ways the Bible describes the Holy Spirit is that the Spirit is like the wind. Think about how the wind blows through the trees . . . activating and moving them – but you don't see the wind. You can only hear it move through branches.
- You can see the effects of the wind as it moves the branches connected to a tree. This is how God's Spirit is with us. We can't see it, but we hear the spirit move like the wind through a tree's branches and leaves.
- Through the gift of the Holy Spirit, we know God never leaves us and makes way for us to remain connected. Through the Holy Spirit, we can trust that **Jesus is always with us.**

NOW WHAT? *What does God want us to do about it?*

OBJECT LESSON | Fruit On The Vine

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this object lesson, you'll need to purchase enough table grapes for your group to have one. As you teach, pass around the grapes and ask each student to take a few and eat them.*
- When we accept Jesus, the Holy Spirit moves in and helps us stay connected to the vine that is Jesus. Typically in nature, if a branch remains attached to the vine, it will bear fruit. A branch connected to the vine can't help but produce fruit because of its connectedness.
 - Every tree has a different fruit. An orange tree couldn't make apples. Grape vines produce grapes like the ones you are eating now. In the same way, if we are connected to Jesus, we begin to bear fruit in our lives.
 - It won't be actual grapes. Our fruit will be tangible things we can experience and see. When we are connected to the true vine, our fruit is that our lives will start to look like Jesus'.

- If Jesus is always with us, then as we remain connected to him, our life, actions, and desires will begin to look like Jesus' life and flow from us because of our connectedness to him. Here are a few ways to help you remain connected to Jesus this week.
 - **REMAIN WITH JESUS:** Make a daily rhythm to declare your connection to Jesus by saying out loud, "Jesus, I know that you're with me," or "Jesus, thanks for your presence," or "Jesus, remind me of your presence today." We send a *gazillion* texts a day. Send a few messages to Jesus throughout your day as a way of reminding yourself that he is with you and you are connected to him.
 - **REMEMBER HIS PRESENCE:** Difficult moments bring an awareness of how much we need Jesus. So, when something hard comes up this week, spend at least five minutes praying. Spend that time focused on talking to him. Turn off distractions and talk to Jesus intentionally and focus on that conversation. If he feels far away, take a few minutes to breathe as a way to remember that the Holy Spirit is as close to you as your breath.
 - **RESPOND TO THE GROWTH:** As you remain connected to Jesus, you will grow and be invited into new opportunities to develop to look and live like Jesus. This could look like getting more connected in this community so you can follow Jesus together, or a chance to share what God is doing in your life, or use the unique ways that God has made you care for others. Respond to those moments and allow them to help you grow in your faith, remembering that Jesus is with you even if the new thing you are trying is hard.
 - **WRITE DOWN YOUR GROWTH:** Ask Jesus to make you attentive to fruit-bearing moments. This is a dangerous prayer because Jesus *will* answer. The Holy Spirit will lead you to do things you haven't done before as you grow in your faith. Write them down in a journal or a note on your phone to reflect on his work in your life.

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - ★ **What questions do you have about how the Holy Spirit helps us stay connected to Jesus?**
 - **What stops you from trusting that Jesus is always with you? What would it look like for that to change?**
 - ★ **Who do you know that trusts Jesus is with them who you could ask for advice when it seems hard?**

IMAGE | "Jesus Is With Me" Lock Screen

- Jesus is always with us, and we can share him where ever we go. Sometimes we may need a little visual prompt in our everyday life to do it. We pick up our phones 344 times daily. That is once every 4 minutes. I think we can all agree that the number is massive, but what if we tried to use those moments to remind us that Jesus is with us?
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *As you teach, show [the image provided](#) in your Week 3 downloads or make your own and take a screenshot of your phone's lock screen with a picture of your voice memo on it.*
- This is the picture of a voice memo saying, "Jesus is with me." They took screenshots of it, and now, every time they look at their phone, they are reminded Jesus is with them.
- What if every time you look at your lock screen this week, you had a visual reminder that you are someone who can choose to be connected with Jesus? You can bear incredible fruit and know that Jesus is always with you. You can be someone who:

- . . . wakes up every day and decides their goal is to spread love and show compassion.
- . . . will open their eyes to look for ways and people to serve others by sticking up for someone being bullied at school or having a hard time in their family.
- . . . is simply with someone they know is lonely to remind them they are not alone.

RESPONSE | Make Your Reminder Screen

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this activity, allow students time to use their phones to make a lock screen like the one above. Before you program, make sure that volunteers are familiar enough with the [voice memo apps on Android](#) and [iPhone](#) to help students get to a place where they can see the waveforms of their voice. Have each student record a voice memo saying, "Jesus is always with me." Take a screenshot of the audio wave in the voice memo app and make a lock screen with that wave on it.*

DISCUSSION

- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *If you have more than 15 students, skip this discussion time and save it for small groups! If you have fewer than 15 students, the starred questions are designed for high schoolers, so you may want to skip them for middle schoolers.*
 - **Read Galatians 5:22–25. What parts of this passage do you hope the Holy Spirit brings into your life? Why?**
 - ★ **What is one thing you have learned about trusting that Jesus is always with you that you want to tell a friend?**
 - **If you were to live trusting that Jesus is always with you, what steps would you need to take to do that?**

PRAYER | Branches Holding Hands

- We don't need to wait to connect to Jesus. We can start today. So we are going to try something that may be new for some of you. We are going to get into small groups and pray out loud together.
- **INSTRUCTIONS:** *For this prayer time, you will need [the image](#) provided in Week 3 of the series materials, load it into your presentation software, and project it onto your screen. Break your group into groups of five to seven students each. Ask them to spread out around your space, stand in a circle, and hold hands if they feel comfortable. Tell them we have been talking about how we hear God's voice over the past weeks, so let's use our voices to speak to God together. Encourage each person to pray through the prayer prompts out loud together. Consider playing some ambient music in the background as people pray.*
- Connecting with Jesus is as simple as this time of prayer. We might have overcomplicated it in the past, but now we know that to grow, we only need to remain connected to the true vine. You can do that on your own or with others. As the Holy Spirit sustains you, you will be reminded that **Jesus is always with us.**