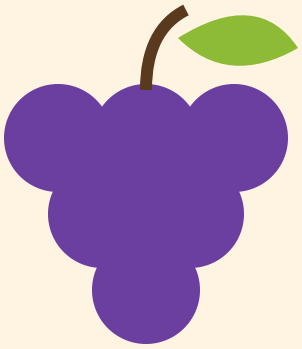
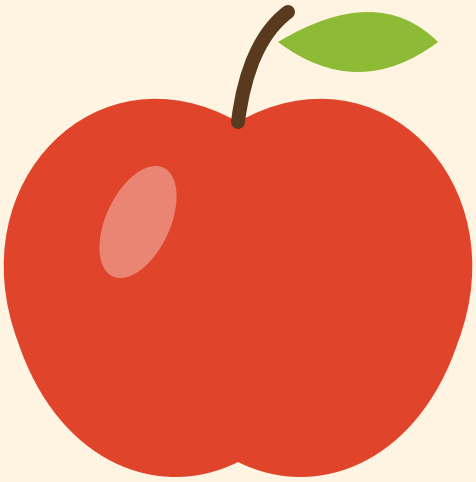
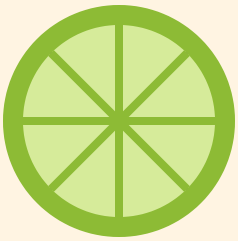
YOUTH GROUP CURRICULUM · AGES 11–18

FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT







WEEK 1 OF 10 · THE VINE

*Real or Wax?*

Theme: Stay connected · Main text: John 15:1–5

# FRUIT CHECK

*Is it real, or just wax fruit?*

**Inside:** 45 / 60 / 75-minute plans · word-for-word scripts · 4 game options · response activity · Joys & Concerns · 3 student pages

**DAHAM**
NEXT GENERATION MINISTRY TOGETHER

WEEK 1 · LEADER GUIDE

# Real or Wax?

Theme: Stay connected · Main text: John 15:1–5 (+ Galatians 5:22–23) · Memory verse: John 15:5

**THE BIG IDEA**

**You can't fake real fruit or force it. It grows when you stay connected to Jesus, the Vine.**

### The question to carry all night

*"What's really growing in me?"*

### By the end, students will…

- Know the nine fruit of the Spirit
- See that fruit grows from *connection*, not trying harder
- Start the Fruit Wall and one "stay connected" step

## NIGHT AT A GLANCE · PICK YOUR LENGTH

| SEGMENT | WHAT HAPPENS | 45 MIN | 60 MIN | 75 MIN |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **Welcome** | Greet new students by name and grade; your announcements | — | — | 5 |
| **Game 1** | Pick from the Activity Menu (next page) | 8 | 10 | 10 |
| **Game 2** | A second game from the menu (optional) | — | — | 10 |
| **Hook + Message** | "Real or Wax?" · John 15:1–5 · Galatians 5:22–23 | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| **Response Activity** | Plant the Fruit Wall + My One Step | 10 | 12 | 12 |
| **Small Group Talk** | Pick 3–4 questions | — | 8 | 10 |
| **Joys & Concerns** | "I lift up ___ to God." / "Lord, hear our prayer." | 10 | 10 | 10 |
| **Pastoral Prayer** | Leader prays over what was shared + send-off | 5 | 5 | 5 |

### Supplies

- One piece of fake (wax or plastic) fruit + one real apple
- Poster board with a simple vine drawn on it (the Fruit Wall)
- Sticky notes, pens, markers, tape
- Game extras: chairs, green yarn, taste-test snacks (see menu)
- Student pages (last 3 pages) · Bibles · phone timer

### Before students arrive

- Choose your games using the Activity Menu
- Read John 15:1–17 and Galatians 5:16–26
- Draw the vine and hang the Fruit Wall where it can stay up
- Think of one time *you* faked it as a teenager
- Pray for each student by name


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CHOOSE WHAT FITS YOUR GROUP

# Activity Menu

Every group is different. Some nights you have fifteen students bouncing off the walls; some nights you have four quiet ones and a visitor. Pick one or two games, then finish with the response activity. Every game ends with a debrief that points back to tonight's question.

| ACTIVITY | ENERGY | PREP | BEST WHEN… | MIN |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| **A. Fruit Basket Real Talk** Swap seats if it's true for you, then tell the story | High | Chairs | Students need to move; you want everyone learning about everyone | 10–12 |
| **B. Real or Fake Taste Test** Taste real fruit vs. "fruit-flavored," talk between rounds | Medium | Snacks, cups, 10 min | You want laughs and the strongest link to the message | 10–12 |
| **C. Grow the Vine** Find a connection, grab the yarn, grow the vine | Low–Med | Ball of green yarn | Lots of new students; you want a picture of "stay connected" | 10 |
| **D. Growth Chart** Trios share "back then vs. now" stories | Low | None | Small or quiet group; students who don't know each other yet | 8–10 |
| **E. Plant the Fruit Wall** Response activity (after message) | Reflective | Poster, sticky notes | Every night: this is the heart of the week and starts the series wall | 12 |

## SUGGESTED COMBINATIONS

### Big, high-energy group (10–15)

A. Fruit Basket Real Talk → B. Real or Fake Taste Test → Message → E. Plant the Fruit Wall

### Small group (4–6)

D. Growth Chart (whole group) → Message → E. Plant the Fruit Wall in a circle

### Lots of first-time visitors

C. Grow the Vine → A. Fruit Basket Real Talk → Message → E. Plant the Fruit Wall (low-pressure option)

### Short on time (45 min)

B. Real or Fake Taste Test → Message → E. Plant the Fruit Wall → Joys & Concerns

**GROUND RULES FOR EVERY GAME** *Nobody is forced to share. Nobody is the punchline. New students get paired with a regular. If a game ever starts to single someone out, change the round and keep moving.*


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## A. Fruit Basket Real Talk

10–12 min · High energy

**Purpose:** The classic seat-swap game with a twist: every few rounds, students stop and tell the *story* behind a move they made. It gets energy out, mixes up friend groups, and lets students learn real things about each other. It also sneaks in the names of the nine fruit of the Spirit.

### HOW TO PLAY

1. Set chairs in a circle, one fewer than the number of players. One person (start with the leader) stands in the middle.
2. The person in the middle finishes the sentence "**Fruit basket for anyone who has ever...**" with something true about themselves.
3. Everyone it's also true for must get up and find a new seat at least two chairs away. The person in the middle grabs a seat too. Whoever is left standing is the new caller.
4. If a caller shouts "**Fruit of the Spirit!**", everyone moves.
5. After every third round, call "**Real Talk!**" Everyone turns to the person on their right and tells the story behind one move they made. 60 seconds each.
6. Anyone who lands in the middle and doesn't want to call can say "Pass" and pick a prompt from the list below.

### LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Everybody grab a chair. I'm in the middle. I'm going to say, 'Fruit basket for anyone who has ever...' and finish it with something true about me. If it's true for you too, you have to get up and find a new seat. Not the one right next to you. Whoever doesn't get a seat is in the middle next. If you hear 'Fruit of the Spirit!', everybody moves."
>
> "And every few rounds I'll yell 'Real Talk!' When I do, turn to the person on your right and tell them the story behind one of your moves. Ready? Fruit basket for anyone who has ever... broken a bone!"

### CALLER PROMPTS ("...ANYONE WHO HAS EVER...")

- Eaten fruit straight off a tree or bush
- Grown something (a plant counts)
- Moved to a new house or school
- Pretended to like a gift
- Been on a plane
- Stayed up past 2 a.m.
- Faked being sick to skip something
- Cried at a movie
- Tried out for a team or play
- Had a job or a side hustle
- Laughed so hard it hurt
- Been the new kid somewhere

### VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Skip the chairs. Everyone stands on a paper plate "seat." Use every round as a Real Talk round, and anyone the prompt is true for gives a one-sentence story.
- **Fruit teams:** Give everyone a fruit name (love, joy, peace...). Calling a fruit's name moves just that team, and "Fruit of the Spirit!" moves everyone.
- **Limited space:** Stay seated. Stand up and sit back down instead of swapping seats.


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**LEADER NOTE** *Watch the "pretended" and "faked" prompts. They're there on purpose to set up the message, but keep them light. Nobody has to tell a Real Talk story they don't want to tell.*

### DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "A lot of us got up when I said 'pretended to like a gift.' Be honest. We're pretty good at faking it. We smile, we say 'I love it,' and inside we're thinking, 'What is this?' Tonight we're starting a series called Fruit Check. And the question for all ten weeks is: **what's really growing in me?**"

## B. Real or Fake Taste Test

10–12 min · Medium energy

**Purpose:** Students taste real fruit side by side with "fruit-flavored" snacks and guess which is which with their eyes closed. It's funny, it gets people talking between rounds, and it sets up the message perfectly: some things look and taste like fruit, but they aren't the real thing.

### HOW TO PLAY

1. Before group, set out small cups in pairs: one real fruit and one "fruit-flavored" snack for the same flavor (see the list below). Label the cups with numbers only.
2. Pair students up. Each pair gets one scorecard (scrap paper). Partners take turns being the taster.
3. The taster closes their eyes (or not, their choice). The partner hands them a cup. The taster calls it: **"Real!"** or **"Fake!"** and rates it 1–5.
4. Between each tasting round, the leader calls out a **Talk Question**. Partners both answer before the next round.
5. After 6–8 rounds, reveal the answers. Pairs count how many they got right.

### LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Find a partner. We have a bunch of mystery cups. Some are real fruit. Some are 'fruit-flavored,' which is a fancy way of saying 'a chemist made this in a lab.' One of you is the taster first. You can close your eyes if you want. Take a bite and call it: real or fake? Then rate it one to five."
>
> "Between every round, I'm going to give you a question. Both of you answer it before we taste again. Round one, go!"


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### TASTE PAIRS + TALK QUESTIONS

| REAL | FAKE | TALK QUESTION (BETWEEN ROUNDS) |
|---|---|---|
| Strawberry | Strawberry gummy | "What's a food you hated as a kid but love now?" |
| Grape | Grape candy or soda | "What's the best meal someone has ever made you?" |
| Orange slice | Orange drink or gummy | "What's a food your family always has on holidays?" |
| Apple slice | Apple-flavored candy | "What's the weirdest food combo you actually like?" |
| Watermelon | Watermelon candy | "What's your favorite summer memory?" |
| Banana | Banana candy | "Who in your life is the best cook?" |
| Cherry | Cherry candy | "What's something that looked great but was disappointing?" |
| Blueberry | Blueberry-flavored snack | "What's something you thought was fake but turned out real?" |
| **Final:** Real apple | Wax or plastic apple (look only!) | Lead into the debrief |

### VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Everyone tastes each cup at the same time, votes by pointing thumbs up (real) or down (fake), and everyone answers the talk question.
- **No-food version:** Show photos of real fruit and fake fruit (wax, plastic, cake that looks like fruit). Pairs vote real or fake.
- **Smell test:** For groups with lots of allergies, sniff only. Still surprisingly hard.

**LEADER NOTE** *Ask about food allergies before anyone tastes anything, and always offer a "just watch and guess" option. Nobody has to close their eyes. Keep the fake fruit on the final round as look-only.*

### DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Some of those fake ones fooled you. They had the color, the smell, even kind of the taste. But there's no actual fruit in there. That's what we're talking about tonight. You can look like you have love or joy or patience, and it can be totally fake. So the question is: **what's really growing in me?**"

## C. Grow the Vine

10 min · Low–Medium energy

**Purpose:** Students build a "vine" out of green yarn, but you can only join it by finding a real connection with someone already on it. By the end, the whole group is literally connected, and everyone has learned something true about at least two people. It's a picture of tonight's big word: *remain*.


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## HOW TO PLAY

1. The leader holds the end of a ball of green yarn and stands in the middle. The leader is "the vine." Everyone else starts off the vine.
2. To join, a student walks up to someone who is **already holding the yarn** and asks questions until they find something they have in common. It has to be something you'd have to *talk* to find out.
3. When they find it, they say it out loud: "**I'm connected to Sam because we both ___.**"
4. The person holding the yarn wraps it once around their hand and passes the ball to the new person. Now they're on the vine.
5. Keep going until everyone is on. For the last round, anyone can connect to anyone, and the yarn crosses the circle.

## LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Right now I'm the vine. This yarn is how you get connected. Come talk to me. Ask me questions until you find something we have in common that you couldn't see just by looking at me. When you find it, say, 'I'm connected to you because we both…' and you get the yarn. Then the next person has to connect to *you*. Let's grow a vine."

## QUESTION IDEAS (TO FIND A CONNECTION)

- What's your favorite fruit?
- What's your go-to snack?
- How many siblings do you have?
- What's a show you've rewatched?
- What's your least favorite chore?
- What's a place you'd love to visit?
- What's your favorite season?
- What did you do last weekend?
- What song is stuck in your head?
- What's your hidden talent?

## VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle and pass the yarn across the circle. Each person must find a connection with the person they're throwing to. Go around twice.
- **Tug test:** At the end, the leader gives the yarn a gentle tug. "Who felt that?" Everyone connected feels it.
- **Snip moment:** Cut one short piece off the end and hold it up. Save it for the message: "This piece isn't going to grow anything."

**LEADER NOTE** *Pair new students with a regular for their first connection so nobody stands alone waiting. Save the yarn vine. It can go on the Fruit Wall poster later.*

## DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Look at this. We're all connected. And if I pull this end…" (*tug gently*) "…everybody feels it. Tonight Jesus is going to use a picture just like this: a vine and branches. And he's going to say the secret to real fruit isn't trying harder. It's staying connected. Keep asking yourself: **what's really growing in me?**"


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## D. Growth Chart

8–10 min · Low energy

**Purpose:** A calm, story-sharing game for small or quiet groups. You know those pencil marks on a door frame that show how tall you were each year? Trios share "back then vs. now" stories about how they've grown. It sets up the message: real growth is slow, and you usually only notice it when you look back.

### HOW TO PLAY

1. Split into trios. Mix it up: "Find two people you know the least."
2. The leader reads a prompt. Each person answers with two parts: **"Back then I... Now I..."**
3. Everyone gets about 30 seconds per prompt. Anyone can pass.
4. Play 4–5 prompts. The leader goes first on the first prompt to model it.
5. Last round, each trio shares the biggest "growth" story they heard (with permission).

### LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
> "Did anybody's family mark your height on a wall or a door frame? We're doing a growth chart tonight, but not for height. I'll read a prompt, and you answer, 'Back then I... Now I...' For example: 'Back then I thought ketchup was a vegetable. Now I know better.' Keep it fun. I'll go first."

### PROMPTS

- A food I used to hate
- What scared me when I was little
- Something I couldn't do at age 7
- What I thought being a teenager would be like
- A show or song I was obsessed with
- A skill I've practiced a lot
- How I handled losing a game
- What I thought about God as a little kid
- Something I used to be embarrassed about
- A friend or person who changed me

### VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Stay together and go around the circle. Anyone can pass.
- **Draw it:** Draw a quick door frame on paper. Mark "Age 7" and "Now" and write one line at each mark.

**LEADER NOTE** *Model a light story, not a heavy one. If a student starts to share something serious, thank them, keep it gentle, and follow up privately (see the Care Note).*

### DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
> "Nobody grew all at once. You didn't wake up one day and suddenly like broccoli. It happened slowly, and mostly you didn't even notice. That's how real fruit grows too. Tonight we're asking a question we'll keep asking for ten weeks: **what's really growing in me?**"


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## Hook: "Real or Wax?"

2 min

**SAY**

*(Hold up the fake fruit in one hand and the real apple in the other.)* "Okay, which one of these looks better? Be honest." *(Let students answer. The fake one usually looks shinier.)*

"This one is perfect. No bruises. It never goes bad. It'll look exactly like this in ten years. But if you bite it…" *(tap it)* "…there's nothing inside. It's wax. This one? It's got a spot. It won't last forever. But it's real. It's alive. It came from a tree."

"Here's the thing. A lot of us are really good at wax fruit. We look nice at church. We act patient when adults are watching. We post the happy picture. For the next ten weeks, we're doing a Fruit Check. And the question is: **what's really growing in me?**"

## Message: Stay Connected to the Vine

10 min

### 1. Everybody has some wax fruit

**SAY**

"Wax fruit is when it looks right on the outside but nothing real is growing on the inside. Saying 'I'm fine' when you're not. Being sweet to a teacher and mean in the group chat. Acting like a Christian on Wednesday night and forgetting about God by Thursday morning."

"I'm not saying that to make anybody feel bad. Everybody has some wax fruit. Me too. The question isn't 'Are you perfect?' It's 'What's real?'"

**LEADER NOTE** *If you have a short, honest story about a time you faked it as a teenager (acting fine, acting spiritual, acting like you had it together), tell it here. Thirty seconds is plenty. Students trust leaders who go first.*

### 2. Jesus says: I am the Vine

**SAY**

"This is the night before Jesus dies. He's eating dinner with his closest friends, and he knows they're about to have the worst weekend of their lives. So he gives them a picture they'll never forget: a grapevine. Listen for one word that keeps showing up."


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[1] *"I am the true vine, and my Father is the farmer. [2] Every branch in me that doesn't bear fruit, he takes away. Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit. [3] You are already pruned clean because of the word which I have spoken to you. [4] Remain in me, and I in you. As the branch can't bear fruit by itself unless it remains in the vine, so neither can you, unless you remain in me. [5] I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing.*

JOHN 15:1–5 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "Did you catch it? **Remain.** Stay. Stay connected. Jesus says it over and over."

### 3. Branches don't try harder. They stay connected.

> **SAY**
>
> "Have you ever seen a grape branch straining really hard to make grapes? 'Come on… come on… ugh!' No. The branch doesn't make the fruit. The branch just stays connected to the vine, and the life of the vine flows into it. The fruit shows up because of the connection."
>
> "That's the difference between wax fruit and real fruit. Wax fruit is what happens when we try to *look* good on our own. Real fruit is what happens when we stay connected to Jesus: when we talk to him, read what he says, hang out with his people, and let him work on us. Jesus even says, 'apart from me you can do nothing.' Not 'a little less.' Nothing."

### 4. What the Spirit grows

> **SAY**
>
> "So what kind of fruit are we talking about? Paul lists it in a letter to some churches in a place called Galatia. Let's read this one out loud together."

[22] *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, [23] gentleness, and self-control. Against such things there is no law.*

GALATIANS 5:22–23 · WORLD ENGLISH BIBLE

> "Notice it says 'the *fruit* of the Spirit,' not 'fruits.' It's one fruit with nine flavors. And it's not a to-do list. It's not 'Try harder to be patient. Try harder to be kind.' It's what the Holy Spirit grows in you when you stay connected to Jesus."
>
> "Each week we'll look at one of these. And we'll be honest about where we're faking it and where it's really growing. No shame. Just a Fruit Check. So here's the question, and I want you to actually think about it: **what's really growing in me?**"


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## E. Response Activity: Plant the Fruit Wall

12 min

**Purpose:** Help students take an honest, private look at what's growing in them, then start the **Fruit Wall**, a poster with a vine that stays up all ten weeks. Every week, students add sticky notes about real fruit they've seen in other people. In Week 10, you'll read the whole wall together.

### HOW TO RUN IT

1. Show the Fruit Wall poster with the vine drawn on it. Explain that it stays up for the whole series.
2. **Nine Fruit Check:** On student page 1, students look at the nine fruit. They privately circle one fruit they see growing in themselves and put a star by one they need the Vine for most. Nobody shares this part.
3. **My Fruit Check:** Students turn to page 2 and mark the private "Real or wax this week?" scale for staying connected to Jesus (1 = mostly wax / 5 = really growing).
4. **Fruit Spotting:** Everyone gets one sticky note and writes: "**Fruit Spotting: I saw ___ (one of the nine) when ___.**" It can be about someone in this room, a friend, family, a coach, anyone. Positive only. Names optional.
5. Students stick their notes on the vine. The leader reads a few out loud (about 2 minutes).
6. **My One Step:** Students fill in "My One Step This Week" on their student page: one small, daily way to stay connected to Jesus.

### LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY (NINE FRUIT)**
>
> "Look at the nine fruit on your page. This part is just between you and God. Circle one you think is actually growing in you. You probably have one. Then put a star next to the one you need the Vine for the most. Nobody is going to see this."
>
> **SAY (MY FRUIT CHECK)**
>
> "Flip to page two. Find the box called My Fruit Check. This week the question is: how connected am I to Jesus right now? One means 'Honestly, it's mostly wax. I'm faking it.' Five means 'It's really growing.' This is not a grade. It's an honest check-in with God. A two is a great, honest answer."
>
> **SAY (FRUIT SPOTTING)**
>
> "Now the fun part. This is our Fruit Wall, and it's staying up all series. Grab a sticky note and write: 'Fruit Spotting: I saw ___ when ___.' Pick any of the nine. 'I saw kindness when my sister helped me with homework.' 'I saw patience when our coach didn't yell.' Positive only, and no inside jokes about anybody. Stick it on the vine."
>
> **SAY (ONE STEP)**
>
> "Last thing. A branch stays connected every day, not once a week. Write one small step on your page for how you'll stay connected to Jesus this week. Keep it tiny. Like: 'Every morning before I check my phone, I'll read John 15:5 and pray one sentence.'"


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### Fruit Spotting examples (read aloud if stuck)

- "I saw **kindness** when a kid sat with the new girl at lunch."
- "I saw **patience** when my mom helped my little brother read."
- "I saw **joy** when our team lost and still laughed together."
- "I saw **gentleness** when my grandpa talked to a scared dog."
- "I saw **love** when my friend texted me after a bad day."

### "Stay connected" step ideas

- Read John 15:5 every morning
- One-sentence prayer at lunch
- Read one psalm at night
- Pray on the bus or car ride
- Worship song on the way to school
- Thank God for 3 things at bedtime
- Text a friend a verse
- Bible app, 5 minutes

## VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Sit in a circle. Each person reads their Fruit Spotting note out loud before sticking it on the vine.
- **Low-pressure option:** Students can write their sticky note without reading anything aloud, and the leader reads a few anonymously.
- **Yarn vine:** If you played Grow the Vine, tape the yarn onto the poster as the vine.

**LEADER NOTE** *Never collect or look at student pages, and don't ask anyone to share their Fruit Check number. Read the sticky notes before reading them aloud. Skip any that are sarcastic or could embarrass someone. Keep the Fruit Wall up all series.*

## DEBRIEF

> **SAY**
>
> "Look at this wall. That's real fruit, in real people, that you actually saw this week. None of it is wax. And every week it's going to grow. For you personally, remember: you don't have to fake it or force it. Just stay connected to the Vine. **What's really growing in me?** Let's find out together."

# Small Group Talk

8–10 min · Optional

Groups of 3–5, with one adult or student leader per group if possible. Pick 3–4 questions that fit your group.

## WARM UP

1. What's the best fruit and the worst fruit? Defend your answers.
   *Follow-up: Any fruit you've never tried?*
2. Where do people our age fake it the most: school, sports, social media, church?
   *Keep it general. No names.*


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## GO DEEPER

3. Why do you think we fake fruit instead of admitting what's really going on?
   *What are we afraid would happen if we were honest?*
4. Jesus says the branch can't bear fruit by itself. What does "trying to bear fruit by yourself" look like in real life?
   *Example: trying to be nice by willpower on a day you're exhausted.*
5. What does staying connected to Jesus actually look like on a normal Tuesday?
6. Which of the nine fruit do you see in someone you look up to? What do you think helped it grow?

## TAKE IT HOME

7. What usually disconnects you from God during the week? (Busy? Phone? Forgetting? Feeling far away?)
8. What's one tiny thing that would help you "remain" this week?

**LEADER NOTE** *Silence is okay. Count to seven in your head before rephrasing. If no one answers, answer it yourself briefly and honestly, then ask again.*


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## Joys & Concerns

10 min

**Purpose:** Students practice praying *for each other*, not just hearing about prayer. It's often the moment new students realize this group actually cares about them. Tonight it fits the theme: prayer is one of the simplest ways a branch stays connected to the Vine, and this is a place where nobody has to fake being fine.

### HOW IT WORKS

1. Sit in a circle if you can. Explain the response: when someone shares, they end with **"I lift up ___ to God."** Everyone responds together: **"Lord, hear our prayer."**
2. Start with **joys** (things to thank God for), then move to **concerns** (things we're worried about or carrying).
3. The leader goes first to model it, with one joy and one concern.
4. Anyone can share, or pass. "Unspoken" requests are welcome, too.
5. Jot down what's shared (first names only) so you can pray for each one in the Pastoral Prayer.

### LEADER SCRIPT

> **SAY**
>
> "Tonight we talked about wax fruit, looking fine on the outside when something else is going on inside. This is the one place where you don't have to fake it. Talking to God together is one of the ways we stay connected to the Vine. So what's something good that happened this week you're thankful for? Or something that's really going on, for you, your family, or a friend?"
>
> "When you share, end with 'I lift up ___ to God.' And all of us will say together, 'Lord, hear our prayer.' Let's practice. I lift up this group to God..." (*All: "Lord, hear our prayer."*)
>
> "I'll go first. My joy is ___. I lift up ___ to God. My concern is ___. I lift up ___ to God."

#### Joy starters (if students are stuck)

- A good grade or finishing a big project
- A birthday, new sibling, or new pet
- My team won / a great practice
- Someone I love got good news
- Just having a good week

#### Concern starters

- A test or tryout coming up
- A grandparent or relative who is sick
- A friend who's going through something
- Feeling far from God lately
- "I have an unspoken request."

### VARIATIONS

- **Small group (4–6):** Go around the circle so everyone gets a turn, and everyone is allowed to pass.
- **Big group (12+):** "Popcorn" style: anyone shares when ready. Cap it at about 8 minutes.
- **Written version:** Students write joys and concerns on slips of paper. The leader reads them (no names) and the group responds.


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**LEADER NOTE** *Say once at the start: "What's shared here stays here, unless someone's safety is at risk." If a student shares something serious, thank them, pray, and follow up privately afterward (see the Care Note).*

## Pastoral Prayer

3–5 min

Pray this over the group. The **[bracketed]** lines are where you name the joys and concerns students just shared.

Jesus, you are the true Vine,

Thank you for every person in this room. Thank you that we don't have to come to you looking perfect. You'd rather have one real, bruised apple than a whole bowl of wax fruit.

Thank you for the good things you've given us this week. *[Name the joys shared: "Thank you for Maya's grandma coming home from the hospital, for Chris's team winning..."]* Every good gift comes from you.

And we bring you the things we're carrying. *[Name the concerns: "Be with Ethan's family. Give Sophia peace before her test on Friday..."]* And for the things that stayed in our hearts tonight and weren't spoken out loud, you already know them. Hold them too.

We confess that we fake it sometimes. We act fine when we're not. We try to be good on our own, and we get tired. Thank you that you don't ask us to try harder. You ask us to stay with you. Holy Spirit, grow real fruit in us: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Not wax. The real thing.

For anyone who feels far from you tonight, pull them close. For anyone who is new here, thank you for bringing them. Help them feel at home. And help each of us stay connected to you this week, one small step at a time.

In Jesus' name, amen.

**SEND-OFF**

"Take your student pages home. There's a five-day devotional in there, just a few minutes a day, and a tracker for your one step. Bring it back next week, and keep your eyes open for real fruit so you can add to the Fruit Wall. Next time we're looking at the first fruit on the list, and it's a word we use for everything from tacos to our moms: **'More Than a Feeling.'** And every week we'll keep asking the same question: **what's really growing in me?** See you then."


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**Next Week Follow-Up:** Open Week 2 by asking students to look at their One Step tracker. "How many days did you stay connected? What helped? What got in the way?" Celebrate any progress, even one day. Then point to the Fruit Wall: "Did anybody spot some real fruit this week? Hold that thought. You'll get to add it tonight."

### Care Note for Leaders

Talking about "wax fruit" can land hard on some students. A student who is good at looking fine may actually be struggling with depression, anxiety, things at home, or feeling like a "fake Christian" who can never measure up. Watch for anyone who seems crushed by the Fruit Check instead of freed by it.

- **Stay calm and thank them** for telling you. "I'm really glad you told me."
- **Be clear:** an honest "1" on the Fruit Check is not failure. God wants the real us, not the polished version.
- **Don't promise to keep secrets** if someone's safety is at risk.
- **Follow your church's safety policy** and tell your lead pastor the same day.
- **Connect them to trained help:** parents or guardians, a school counselor, or a licensed counselor. In the U.S., anyone can call or text **988** (Suicide & Crisis Lifeline) any time.

You're not expected to be a counselor. Your job is to listen well, take it seriously, and make sure they're connected to the right people.


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THE FULL SERIES

# FRUIT CHECK · 10 Weeks

Each week stands alone, so new students can jump in any week. Taught in order, the ten weeks start with the Vine and then look at each fruit of the Spirit one at a time, with an honest, grace-filled question: is it real, or just wax fruit? The question every week: *What's really growing in me?*

| # | WEEK | TEXT |
|---|---|---|
| 1 | **Real or Wax?** The Vine | John 15:1–5 |
| 2 | **More Than a Feeling** Love | 1 Corinthians 13:4–7 |
| 3 | **Singing at Midnight** Joy | Acts 16:22–26 |
| 4 | **Asleep in the Storm** Peace | Mark 4:35–41 |
| 5 | **Worth the Wait** Patience | James 5:7–8 |
| 6 | **A Seat at the Table** Kindness | 2 Samuel 9:1–13 |
| 7 | **Making It Right** Goodness | Luke 19:1–10 |
| 8 | **Where You Go** Faithfulness | Ruth 1:6–18 |
| 9 | **Strong and Gentle** Gentleness | Matthew 11:28–30 |
| 10 | **Who's Driving?** Self-Control | Prov. 25:28 · 1 Cor. 9:24–27 |

### Every week includes

- 45 / 60 / 75-minute schedules
- Activity Menu with 4+ game options
- Word-for-word leader scripts
- Scripture (World English Bible) and one big idea
- Response activity + "One Step" challenge
- The Fruit Wall and a private weekly Fruit Check
- Tiered discussion questions
- Joys & Concerns prayer time
- Pastoral prayer with space for your group
- Student pages and 5-day devotional
- Next-week follow-up

### Built for real youth groups

These weeks were written for a real Wednesday night group: 5 to 15 students, often with a new face or two, led by a pastor or volunteer with limited prep time. Games never single anyone out. Every activity has a small-group version. And every leader script can be read word for word when you're short on time.

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Scripture quotations are from the World English Bible (public domain).

# FRUIT CHECK

Name: _____ Date: _____

**TONIGHT'S BIG IDEA**

**I can't fake real fruit or force it. It grows when I stay connected to Jesus, the Vine.**

## THE STORY · JOHN 15:4–5

"_____ in me, and I in you... I am the _____. You are the _____.
He who remains in me and I in him bears much _____, for apart from me you can do
_____."

How does a branch make fruit? _____

## NINE FRUIT CHECK · GALATIANS 5:22–23

Private, just you and God. **Circle** one fruit you see growing in you. **Star** one you need the Vine for most. Then write what the wax (fake) version might look like for a few of them.

| FRUIT | WHAT THE REAL THING LOOKS LIKE | WHAT THE WAX VERSION LOOKS LIKE |
|---|---|---|
| **Love** | Showing up for people | |
| **Joy** | Glad in God, even on hard days | |
| **Peace** | Calm inside because God is with me | |
| **Patience** | Waiting without blowing up | |
| **Kindness** | Noticing people and helping | |
| **Goodness** | Doing what's right, even unseen | |
| **Faithfulness** (WEB: "faith") | Someone people can count on | |
| **Gentleness** | Strong, but not harsh | |
| **Self-Control** | Me in charge, not my impulses | |

One place I'm tempted to fake it (school, home, church, online):

_____


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# My One Step

## MY ONE STEP THIS WEEK

A branch stays connected every day. Keep it small enough to actually do.

Every _____ (morning / lunch / bedtime / car ride)

I will stay connected to Jesus by _____

Example: "Every morning before I check my phone, I will read John 15:5 and pray one sentence."

### My Fruit Check · Staying connected to the Vine

Real or wax this week? Circle one.

1 = mostly wax, I'm faking it (1) (2) (3) (4) (5) 5 = really growing

Where I need to stay connected: _____

*This is not a grade. It's an honest check-in with God.*

## MY WEEK TRACKER

Check each day you did your step.

| MON | TUE | WED | THU | FRI | SAT | SUN |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ | ☐ |

## MY PRAYER LIST

Write down the joys and concerns people shared tonight (first names only) and keep praying this week.

| JOYS: THANK YOU, GOD, FOR… | CONCERNS: PLEASE BE WITH… |
|---|---|
| | |

✂ CUT OUT AND KEEP IN YOUR PHONE CASE, WALLET, OR BIBLE

*"I am the vine. You are the branches. He who remains in me and I in him bears much fruit, for apart from me you can do nothing."*

JOHN 15:5

I stay connected by: _____

My step: M ☐ T ☐ W ☐ T ☐ F ☐ S ☐ S ☐



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## 5 Days on the Vine

TAKE-HOME DEVOTIONAL · 5 MINUTES A DAY

Each day: read the verse, think about the question, write one honest sentence. That's it.

**DAY 1** John 15:1–2 · The Farmer

Jesus says his Father is the farmer who takes care of the vine. What's one area of your life you'd like God to take care of this week?

**DAY 2** John 15:4 · Remain

"Remain in me, and I in you." What usually pulls you away from God during a normal day?

**DAY 3** John 15:5 · Apart from me

Where have you been trying to "be good" on your own and getting tired? Tell God about it honestly.

**DAY 4** Galatians 5:22–23 · One fruit, nine flavors

Read the list slowly. Which fruit have you seen in someone else this week? Write it down for the Fruit Wall.

**DAY 5** Psalm 1:1–3 · Planted by the water

A tree planted by water doesn't worry about fruit. It just drinks. What helps you "drink" from God?

### A prayer you can pray this week

*Jesus, I don't want to fake it anymore. Thank you that I don't have to try harder to be good on my own. Help me stay connected to you today. Holy Spirit, grow something real in me, even if it grows slowly. Amen.*

Next week · Week 2: **More Than a Feeling**


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