



the Source

Let anyone who is thirsty come to me...

In George Orwell's novel, *Animal Farm*, animals take over The Manor Farm in a revolution to end the tyranny of human domination. For a while, there is peace and equality. The human owners and workers are driven from the farm, and it is renamed "Animal Farm." All the animals live together in peace, each one being equal to the other. Indeed, their most coveted commandment reads, "All animals are equal."

In time, however, the pigs take on leadership roles, and expect a certain elevated status. Slowly, methodically, they acquire privileges distinct from the rest of the barnyard beasts. By the end of the story, the pigs have begun to look strangely like humans. The pig ring leader, Napoleon, holds a party with neighboring humans, and the once supreme commandment now reads, "All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others."

In a different story, Jesus tells his disciples to bear fruit inasmuch as each of them is a branch of the vine, which is himself, the Father being the gardener. In this allegory, branches of a vine bear no distinction. One branch is neither more nor less important than the other. Each is intertwined to the point where you cannot tell where one begins and another ends. The only distinction is whether or not they bear fruit. Those that do not are thrown away. Those that do have complete joy, the joy of the Lord. How are you known in our church, in our community? Are you known for your selfless acts of love? Do you contribute without any desire for special recognition or favoritism? In the Father's vineyard, there is no privilege or rank. Coming from a career in the military, that's pretty bold, reminding me that the raw recruit, in God's eyes, has equal standing with the four-star general. The same is true for all God's people, as branches of the same vine, as long as we bear fruit.

— Rev. Van Dickens, Retired Clergy-in-Residence

**Consider
the Source**
John 15:5-11;
Galatians 5:22-23

A Family Affair

Together with your family read John 15:5-12 and then Galatians 5:22-23. Share ideas about the vine imagery used in John.

Jesus describes himself as the vine. A vine is part of a plant that contains branches. The branches are connected to the vine and receive food and water from the vine. The nutrients allow the branches to produce fruit. If the branch is plucked off of the vine, it will no longer be able to produce fruit.

Last summer in children's Sunday School, we focused on the *Fruits of the Spirit* described in the Galatians verses. Jesus wants us to produce a lot of good fruit like kindness, patience and faithfulness. Most of all, he wants us to love others as he loves us. He does not expect us to produce these good fruits on our own. The Holy Spirit lives in us. It is our connection to Jesus, the vine, that allows us to produce good fruit.

If you were the only Jesus others see, would they know the fruit of the spirit? Make a list of times each of you has demonstrated bearing fruit at school, with your family and friends. Plan a time to be purposeful in showing the fruit of the Holy Spirit to others.

Dear God, thank you for the example of Jesus who came to live among us. Thank you for the Bible and all we can learn from reading it. Help us to bear your fruit each day. In Jesus name, Amen.

—Jennifer Hall, Director of Children's Ministry

Monday: John 15:5-6

The only distinction Jesus makes between branches is whether or not they bear fruit. What happens to fruitless branches is painfully clear, but I think the pain is also felt by God. I recently had to prune a branch off of my brand-new pecan tree because a bug ate the tip that had all the leaves. It wasn't much fun. I have been watching that little tree bud out every day. Taking a pair of scissors to it was the last thing I wanted to do, but it had to be done for the good health of the tree.

- Have you ever worked hard for a good cause, and then when all seems to be for nothing, you turned to God for wisdom and guidance? How much more fruitful our efforts would be if we first turned to God for blessing and discernment!
- How do you know when you are abiding in Christ? How does the world know we are Christians? By our _____?

Tuesday: John 15:7-8

Ask for whatever I wish, and it will be done? Ok, how about a million bucks...or ten million bucks! Remember, though, God's answer to prayer is more a matter of trusting God and abiding in God's will. If a million bucks comes out of that, then it is because God has something "godly" in mind, which is other than one's own selfish gratification.

- What has been at the heart of your prayers lately?
- What do you want God to do for you? For me, often it is to understand the things that happen in my life that leave me baffled. I find myself these days praying for peace to accept those things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference (to paraphrase theologian Reinhold Niebuhr).

Wednesday: John 15:9-10

The Father loves Jesus the way Jesus loves us...unconditionally, unmerited, sacrificially, always taking the initiative, forgiving, and abiding in us so that we may fulfill our mission in life.

- How do you "abide" in Jesus' love? What are the spiritual tools God gives you to do that?
- How does the love between the Father and Son take flesh in your own brand of love for others?

Thursday: John 15:11

The reason for Jesus' discourse is simply for the sake of our joy, which is more than happiness, or satisfaction over a particular accomplishment, or even living a long and healthy life. When we place our lives in the hands of a loving God, regardless of our circumstances, then "Whatever my lot, Thou hast taught me to say, it is well, it is well with my soul."

- What does the joy of the Lord mean to you?
- Think of the joy of Jesus...on the cross. Is that happiness? Freedom from pain? If that boggles your mind, as it does mine, think of what the cross became as a result of Jesus, and the joy that came from this supreme act of love, the fruit it bore.

Friday: Galatians 5:22-23

Are we talking about the same thing? Jesus' words to the disciples, and Paul's words to the church at Galatia? I think so! Abiding in Jesus is what it means to live in the Spirit, to let Christ's spirit rule in our hearts. It can only result in much fruit, some of which Paul spells out.

- What does Christian generosity mean to you? In what ways can you say that you practice self-control?
- What fruits of the Holy Spirit do you cultivate in your life? How do you allow God's grace to work wonders in you?