

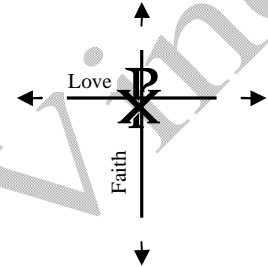
"Connected to the Vine"

LWML Puppet Place

I. "Establishing a Connection"

In our world, "staying connected" has perhaps never been easier. TV, Internet, Cell Phones, iPods, Laptops, BlackBerrys, Webcams...and the list goes on. Amazingly, though, amidst all of this "connection" we continue to see more and more loneliness and isolation. The question is, "Who and what are we connected to?"

Jesus' words are clear – if we're not connected to Him, the branch withers and dies. Christ is the connection we all desperately need. Christ's death and resurrection connects us to God and it connects us to each other. The cross has long been used as a symbol of that connection – the vertical beam of the cross representing our restored connection to the Father through Jesus' death and the horizontal beam representing our restored connection to each other.



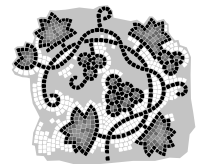
II. "Connecting to the Word"

a. Read **John 15:1-17**. This conversation between Jesus and His disciples is part of a longer conversation called "The Farewell Discourse" (chapters 14-17).

1. Why is Jesus saying "farewell" to His disciples?
2. How are the disciples going to feel about this? (E.g., John 13:36-37; 16:6, 20)
3. Obviously, though, we know this is not your normal farewell. Why not? (E.g. see John 14:3, 18-19)
4. Speaking of "staying connected", how many times does Jesus use the word "abide" or "remain"? Why does He use it so many times?

b. Jesus reassures them that this farewell isn't the end of the story. He uses the metaphor of the vine and branches to show how He will "keep in touch" or "stay connected".

5. Describe the connection between a vine and its branches. What does the vine give? Why do the branches need the vine?
6. Just to be clear from the beginning, why is Jesus' use of "abide" different from our normal use of "abide"? (Hint: look at the word that comes after "abide")
7. Just as branches depend on the vine for life, the life of the disciples depends on remaining in the *true* vine, Jesus. Examine verse 3: How are they already connected to Jesus, the true vine?
8. What will happen to the disciples, and to all of Jesus' followers, if they don't remain in Him? (verse 6)
9. Look at verse 7. Also look at John 14:25-27. How will Jesus remain connected to His disciples?
10. What will this connection to Jesus give to the disciples? See 15:5, 7, 9, 11



III. Connecting the Word to our Lives

c. Considering the image of the vine and branches, we realize that a branch wouldn't even exist without the vine. It is completely dependent on the vine which created it and sustains it.

11. Jesus says we are the branches. Who created us? (Gen. 1)
Can we ever create new branches (new life) by ourselves?

12. Read **Ezekiel 18:4**. Do all people belong to God? However, do all people abide in Christ? Why or why not?

13. The problem is...what happened to our connection with our Creator? (Genesis 3)

b. So here's the problem: staying connected to Jesus is obviously important but our sin has broken the connection. How do we restore it?

14. Read **John 1:12-13**. How does someone become a child of God?
Look at verse 12, and then verse 13.

15. If the Bible routinely rules out our free will as the way to connect to God and abide in Christ, then what does a good connection to Jesus depend on? Look at **Romans 9:16**.

16. Look up 1 Peter 2:24. Ironically, the tree that broke our connection to our Creator was restored by what?

17. The vertical beam of the cross symbolizes that we are again connected to our Creator and heavenly Father. What does this connection mean for us?

d. It's no secret that everyone needs to stay connected. We're always staying connected in our daily lives.

Let's take a moment to list some people, places, and things that we stay connected to and why:

People	Places	Things

18. Considering all those connections, what are some *false* vines that people look to for life and purpose?

19. The only connection that gives life, peace, joy, etc. is in Jesus. We already saw that the disciples were connected to the Vine through His Word and Holy Spirit. Look at Romans 10:17.
How are we connected to Jesus and His life-giving cross?

20. Look up Romans 6:3-5. When did you receive this connection?



21. What gift does God give you and strengthen in you that keeps you connected? (Galatians 3:24-26)
22. Now go back to John 15:1-3. How does the great Gardener make sure that you remain connected to the vine?
23. Grafting you to the vine, bearing fruit from the vine, keeping you in the vine – all of it is God’s gracious work in Christ through faith. Sometimes we may feel like we’ve grown far away from the vine or that the fruit we are bearing is quite rotten. How does Jesus teaching about the vine and branches calm our concerns about being cut off from the vine?

IV. Fleshing Out the Connection

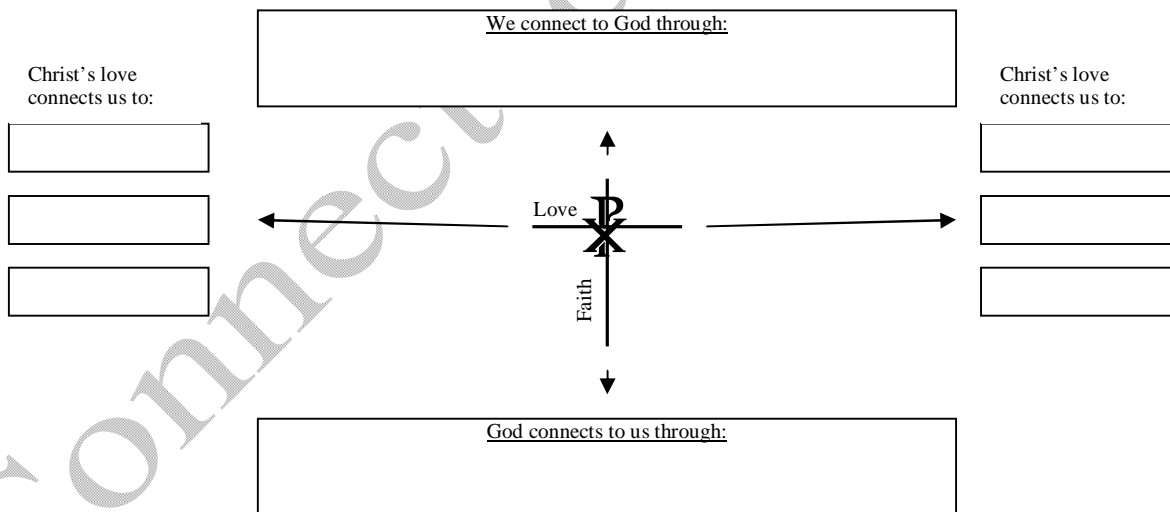
e. We are connected to God through faith in Jesus Christ. And this connection is one that God establishes, confirms, strengthens, and completes. God connects us to Christ and keeps us connected by giving us faith through the Word and through the Sacraments. Without this connection, the branch withers and dies. But when we are connected to God through Christ, the branch bears fruit and flourishes.

24. You may have heard these words in church after taking the Lord’s Supper: “strengthen us through the same [this gift] in faith toward you and in fervent love toward one another.” Look again at John 15:8-9. Now that Jesus has given the disciples faith through His Word, what will they give to one another?

25. Not only does the cross of Christ connect us to God through faith, but the love of Christ poured out for us on the cross flows through us and connects us to one another. Look at Ephesians 1:15 and 2 Thessalonians 1:3.

26. How does love connect us to one another and bind us together? (Consider 1 Corinthians 13)

19. Look again at the symbol of the cross. Through faith, the cross of Jesus connects us to the Father and through love the cross connects us to one another.



V. Conclusion

Now where do you fit in the picture? The sign of the cross is made over you in Baptism and every time your sins are forgiven. The fruits of the cross are given to you in body and soul at the Lord’s Table. The cross keeps you connected to the vine, Jesus Christ. And in Him, you bear fruit and await His coming with confidence, living in faith to God and love toward your neighbors.