Lesson 3—Abiding in Jesus

Unit Summary
The “Fruit of the Spirit” may be a familiar topic to many children, but kids and adults alike often misunderstand the concept of growing spiritual fruit. Many Christians describe spiritual fruit as characteristics that they should work to develop in their lives. Nothing could be further from the truth! Fruit of the Spirit is—of the Spirit. These godly traits result from God’s Spirit working in our lives, not from our efforts to be better people.

This four-week series will walk children through the process of nurturing the soil of their souls so God’s Spirit might produce genuine spiritual fruit within them. After the seed of salvation has been planted in good soil and moistened with Living Water, children will discover that their spiritual lives are like growing plants; and God is like a loving gardener. They’ll learn that as they are pruned through loving discipline and abide in Jesus, spiritual fruit will blossom in their lives. This unit will guide kids—not into being “good”—but to drawing closer to the Lord so He can conform them into Jesus’ likeness.

Lesson Summary
What good news to hear that God doesn’t expect perfection—He expects direction! God earnestly desires each of His children to grow ever closer to Jesus. As we abide or remain in Jesus, His character and influence permeate our lifestyle and are seen in ever-expanding ways! We call this the Fruit Formula—we must die to ourselves, and as Jesus lives His life through us, the Holy Spirit produces lasting fruit. This lesson will show children how God, like a loving gardener, tends souls to help us grow and produce spiritual fruit. They will see that they cannot produce lasting fruit on their own, but as they stay in constant contact with Jesus, He produces fruit in them—fruit that will last forever!

Paul’s Power Principle: My death to self + Jesus’ life in me = spiritual fruit!

DISCIPLE TARGETS

In this lesson, your children will...

KNOW
• When believers die to themselves, the abiding Christ produces spiritual fruit

FEEL
• Fascinated that Jesus actually wants to live through them

DO
• Determine to draw near to Christ so He can grow fruit in their lives
SPARK INTEREST

Choose from the following activities and ideas to engage kids and grab their attention.

**Welcome!—Grapes**
As the children arrive, give them small clusters of grapes to snack on and enjoy. You may want to create giant vines that kids can pluck the grapes from. When they ask why they are getting grapes, let them know it has to do with the lesson.

**Let’s Meet-n-Greet!**
Turn and greet the children around you. Tell the person beside you something cool about yourself that most people probably don’t know. Did you learn interesting information about the kids sitting near you? Often we have no idea about the interesting people right beside us—at the store, on the bus, or as we walk down the street. But God knows everything about us!

Leaders, be sure to stop whatever you are doing to move through the audience and greet the children, especially those you do not recognize. Announce any birthdays for the week. (See the How to Use DiscipleTown guide for quick and easy ways to acknowledge visitors and birthdays.)
Let’s Worship!
As you lead into your worship time, emphasize to the children that God knows everything about us. He even knows the sinful things we did this week, yet He loves us anyway. As we worship this morning, we want to leave those things behind and start fresh with clean hearts.

Recommended Song: Jesus Loves Even Me by Philip Bliss

Puppet Intro
Leader & puppet introduce today’s lesson. You will find a scripted version of this intro at the end of the lesson. Supplies: puppet, fake fruit

Puppet comes out with fake fruit attached all over. When the leader asks why, the puppet says he read in John 15 that if Jesus didn’t see any fruit, He would cut him off and throw him into a fire! “Felt doesn’t do so well in a fire!” Leader explains that Jesus was talking about spiritual fruit and then gives examples of spiritual fruit he has seen in the puppet’s life lately as he has applied the lessons.

Let’s Play!—Guess the Fruit
Supplies: sealed box with a hand-hole in the top, clipboard, pens, paper, samples of various fruits (banana, apple, pear, orange, kiwi, etc.), cleanup supplies, napkins, blindfolds for the second option

This game is fun when set up as boys vs. girls. Choose two teams of four to six kids to compete. Seat participants on stage in chairs that are lined up in two rows facing each other. Place the box in between. The first round consists of every child walking up to the box and reaching through a hole to feel a fruit and try to guess what it is. The player may say nothing at all. Each child returns to the chair and privately writes on a sheet of paper the name of the fruit he or she thinks was in the box. Have children write in large letters. On the leader’s signal, all contestants show their answers to the audience at the same time. Every correct answer earns 100 points for the team.

TIP: Start with a banana in the box so everyone guesses correctly the first time. Grapes and apples will be easier, but as you get into other rounder fruits, it will become more difficult. For ideas, use the fruit list provided in the Welcome activity for Lesson 4.

OPTIONAL ROUND TWO: Tasting!
The audience will enjoy this! Next, blindfold the children and give each a taste of a fruit. Again, they may say nothing after they taste it. Remove the blindfolds and again have the kids write down their guesses and reveal their answers to the audience.

TIP: To make an easy blindfold, buy plastic half-masks at a party supply store and tape paper over the eye holes on the inside of the masks. The masks are impossible to see through, come on and off quickly and easily, and are reusable whenever you need a blindfold!
Connect with Your Kids

*This object lesson primes the kids to think about value.* **Supplies:** related object or picture

Do you have a personal story of a time you had to be patient? Patience is often one of the more difficult “fruits” for children to develop. Help your children see that adults have a hard time being patient, too. I enjoy telling children the story of how my wife and I were engaged for sixteen months. On the anniversary of our engagement we went to dinner. While we were eating, my family came to the restaurant and decorated our car as “Just Married.” On our entire drive home, people honked and waved and congratulated us on just getting married—but we still had four more months until our wedding! It was hard to be patient, but our wedding day finally arrived, and we are now living “happily ever after.” I show a wedding picture when I tell this story! Tell your own story of a time you needed great patience. If possible, use an object or image to enhance your tale.
DiscipleTown Visitor

Tracy the Tree Trimmer: Just as the leader finishes the “Connect” story above, Tracy the Tree Trimmer walks down the street (wearing work clothes and gloves, safety glasses, and carrying a tree trimmer—if you can’t get a tree trimmer, take a long pole and tape a pair of scissors to the top. Tie a rope through one of the finger holes, leaving a length of rope as long as the pole.).

Leader: Hey there, Tracy!
Tracy: Hey, howdy there!
Leader: Excuse me, but can I ask you what [Points to tree trimmer.] that is?
Tracy: This here is a tree trimmer.
Leader: A tree trimmer? I didn’t know that trees needed haircuts.
Tracy: Oh, yes—that is, if you want them to be healthy and keep ‘em out of trouble.
Leader: A tree can get in trouble?
Tracy: Not with the principal, [Looks at kids and smiles.] but with power lines, maybe…
Leader: Oh, that’s true.
Tracy: And you wouldn’t want a tree branch growin’ through yer bedroom window, would ya?
Leader: Maybe if tasty fruit grew on the end! [Laughs.]
Tracy: Well, funny you should bring up fruit.
Leader: Why’s that?
Tracy: If you want good fruit, you gotta keep a fruit tree trimmed.
Leader: Really?
Tracy: Really! Ya trim it back in the fall so that come spring the tree’ll have fresh ends to grow fresh fruit. Long, heavy branches won’t produce much fruit.
Leader: But doesn’t it hurt the tree to have its branches trimmed?
Tracy: I don’t know, I’ve never asked one [Laughs.] But even if trees do feel pain, I reckon it’s worth it in the long run. You know, “No pain, no gain,” as they say.
Leader: True. I guess the same is true with us.
Tracy: How’s that?
Leader: Well, the Bible says that God prunes us—He cuts away things that will weigh us down and keep us from producing spiritual fruit.
Tracy: Does it hurt?
Leader: Sometimes, but like you said, in the long run, it’s good for us.
Tracy: No pain, no gain!
Leader: That’s right.
Tracy: Well, sounds like God is a Good Gardener!
Leader: That He is! He’s the Gardener of our hearts.
Tracy: Well, I know I’ve got some things He’s clippin’ away at.
Leader: Me, too.
Tracy: Speakin’ of clippin’, I gotta get to my next job, catch ya later!
Let's Search!—Bible Dash

Supplies: Bibles

Ask all kids with Bibles to participate, or invite a few volunteers to come to the front. As children hold Bibles closed with hands on covers, state the Bible reference twice, then on the command “SEARCH!” have the students race to locate the verse. Once they have a finger on the verse, they can stand and call out, “FOUND IT!” Have the first child read the verse aloud while you project the verse on a screen via PowerPoint. See suggestions below for comments on each verse. Keep your comments brief and to the point of the lesson.

- Galatians 2:20 I am crucified with Christ, who lives in me; now I live by faith.
- John 15:4 You cannot bear fruit unless you remain in Jesus.
- Proverbs 18:24 There is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.
- John 15:14 You are Christ’s friends if you do what He commands.
- Matthew 7:16-20 A good tree cannot bear bad fruit; a bad tree cannot bear good fruit.

Paul’s Power Principle: My death to self + Jesus’ life in me = spiritual fruit! See below for more explanation on this idea, called the Fruit Formula.

Let’s Learn!—Growing Up Godly   John 15

What I’m about to tell you may sound very strange, maybe even backwards, but God’s ways are not our ways. To understand how we produce spiritual fruit, let’s look again at how a plant grows.

Before a seed produces fruit, it must die! The new plant replaces the seed to grow and eventually produces fruit. In a very similar way, the Bible says that Christians are “dead.” We died with Jesus on the cross. Let’s look at Romans 6:6.

We were slaves to sin, meaning, we couldn’t help sinning—it was in our nature. Slaves must do whatever their master tells them. When you were a slave to sin, you did what your old nature told you. You could try to disobey your sin nature and do good, but eventually your old nature would win. But when you accepted Jesus as Savior, your old self died with Him.

Look up Galatians 2:20. When you become a Christian, the “old you” that was a slave to sin dies. From then on, you become Jesus’ slave, doing what He wants you to do. But you don’t have to do it all with your own effort—Christ helps you!

We’ll call this process the FRUIT FORMULA! Use the PowerPoint slides to introduce the Fruit Formula—my death to self + Jesus’ life in me = spiritual fruit

Now let’s look at John 15. This wonderful passage gives us many insights into God, the Gardener of our hearts.
v. 1 Jesus is the Vine; God is like a Gardener.

v. 2 Fruitless branches are cut off. And God prunes fruitful branches so they will produce even more. Note that no branches are left alone. All are cut!

vv. 4-5 To produce fruit, we must remain close to Jesus.

v. 7 God answers the prayers of those who stay close to Jesus!

v. 8 God wants you to bear LOTS of fruit, not just a little.

v. 11 You will be happier when you are fruitful.

vv. 12-13 Love is the greatest of all fruit.

vv. 14-15 Jesus calls you His FRIEND!

v. 16 Jesus wants you to produce fruit that will last forever.

v. 17 Another reminder—the most important fruit is LOVE.

So, if we want to see spiritual fruit, we need to die to self and allow God to work in our lives! God’s part is to do the pruning; our part is to deny self and to be patient while He does His work—trusting that He will complete His work so we will be just like Jesus!

Philippians 1:6 GOD’S PART: Pruning | YOUR PART: Patience

Dee’s Disciple Tip: Plants need GOOD SOIL to stand strong in tough times. Christians need a GOOD CHURCH to stand strong in tough times.

KeyVerse

Topic: The Vine and the Branches

Reference: John 15:5

1) Repeat the verse with hand motions from Lesson 1.

2) Repeat the verse silently, saying the verse in the mind only.

3) Now, we will say the verse backwards! Turn your back to the audience and say the verse. Have the children do the same thing. It’s a little silly, but the kids will enjoy the humor, and the repetition will help them continue to reinforce the memory verse.

Note: Always begin the verse with “Jesus said” so the children understand that this is a direct quote from Jesus. Otherwise, younger children may misunderstand, thinking they are saying they are the vine as they recite.
Dramatize the Point

Act this out or read as a story. **Supplies:** four kids, one adult coach, a whistle, many personal items

The kids arrive for the first day of cross country, and the coach welcomes them and prepares them for their first race. The kids all have backpacks, cell phones, iPods, books, hand-held game systems, etc. The coach instructs them to take all that stuff off and lighten up for the race. All the kids do so except for one boy. (Choose the actor who can be most humorous to play this part.) Set up a track, perhaps with masking tape on the floor that goes around the perimeter of the room. When the coach blows his whistle, the kids take off running. The other kids can actually race, but the one who kept all his stuff struggles to keep it all. He drops things, his backpack is falling off, and you may even have someone call his cell phone during the skit so he can answer, “This isn’t a good time. I’m running a race. Can I call you back?” He can also be sending text messages. When he finally gets across the finish line, the coach has some bad news for him—the coach cuts him from the team.

This skit may have been funny to watch, but it wasn’t funny to the coach. He wanted a winning team, so he cut that boy from the team. He didn’t want someone on his team who wasn’t serious and who would drag everyone else down. Jesus warned in John 15 that He would cut the branches with no fruit from the tree. This doesn’t mean people can lose their salvation. But if you produce no fruit, you will miss out on being part of what God is doing. So, do your best and when God says to let some things go, listen to Him. The Lord knows what He is talking about. He wants you to be a winner.

Object Talks—Feeling Grape

**Supplies:** video projection

The video clip for this lesson features Karl, the Kidologist, doing a short object lesson featuring a conversation between a watermelon and a bunch of grapes who discuss the power of many small grapes when they are connected to the Vine. Use this short teaching video to show the kids or to train a leader to do the talk “live.” **Featured verse:** John 15:1, 8

Let’s Talk!—Small Group Discussion

If you break into small groups, the following discussion questions will help your group leaders get personal with their students.

1) When is it most difficult for you to be patient?
2) What is a habit you need to break?
3) If you could start a new good habit, what would be it?

Go around the circle and pray for the person on your right. Pray that God would help him or her break a bad habit, start good habits, and have more patience while God is working.
DiscipleTown Super Citizen
Choose a child whom you observed being patient during the service.

Let's Pray!
Prayer: Today’s lesson was on staying connected to Jesus. Walk into the center of the audience and put your hands on the shoulders of two kids. Invite these children to connect with each other by putting a hand on the shoulder of a person beside them, etc. Make sure no one is left disconnected during prayer time.

Dear God, we are connected here today as a way of saying we want to be connected to You. We acknowledge that apart from You we can do nothing. We want to bear good spiritual fruit for You, but we understand that on our own we can’t be very good for very long. Help us stay connected to You. Help us tap into Your power through reading Your Word, praying, and meeting with Your people at church. When You need to prune us, help us yield to You and to trust that You are working in us so we can produce even more fruit in the years ahead.

We love You, Lord Jesus, and we can’t wait to see what You will do in our lives in the weeks and months and years ahead as we strive to stay connected to You and to each other. In Jesus’ name, amen.

Cy's Challenge: As you end each day, ask God to show you what was good, and what could be better tomorrow. If you will ask Him, He will show you. This is what it means to remain and to abide in Him. It means opening yourself to what the Lord wants to show you and being willing to work with Him toward the changes He reveals to you.

Let's Review!
If you have extra time, use these review questions to keep the kids focused on the lesson until time to dismiss. A handful of candy will help you keep their attention. After each question, take a minute to reiterate the lesson point related to the question.

1) My ______ to self + Jesus’ ______ in me = spiritual fruit!
2) Why does a Tree Trimmer trim trees?
3) A seed has to ______ before it can become a plant.
4) Before we were Christians, we were ______ to sin.
5) Good soil is to plants like a ______ is to Christians.
6) Our part is patient yielding, God’s part is ________.
For the Home

**DiscipleTown Table Talker:** Give each child a copy of this week’s *DiscipleTown Table Talker*. Be sure to show them how to put it together and encourage the kids to ask their parents to lead family devotions three times this week.

**Parent E-mail:** Copy and send the e-mail below to help your parents connect with their kids during the week. Send them early in the week, but not on Sunday. As a courtesy, be sure parents have opted to receive these e-mails. Review and edit as necessary to reflect the lesson elements you have used. You can also find this e-mail as a Microsoft Word document in your download bundle.

Dear Mom and Dad,

We are in our third week of *How to Grow Spiritual Fruit*. The first week we learned about accepting the “seed of salvation” by beginning a relationship with God through faith in Jesus Christ. The second week we learned about growing up godly and saw how Jesus grew in wisdom, in stature, and in favor with God and people. This past week we dug even deeper into John 15 and discovered what it means to abide in Jesus.

Just as seeds must die before becoming plants, people must die with Christ on the cross when becoming Christians. Spiritual fruit begins to grow as believers die to self and abide in Jesus. While these are abstract concepts for children, it is never too early to help them understand that the key to the Christian life is not “trying to be good,” but rather abiding in Christ who lives through them—helping them make good choices. As believers know, love, and serve God, He helps them become the individuals He created them to be.

Here are some questions to engage your child about last week’s lesson.

1) What is the Fruit Formula? (my death to self + Jesus’ life in me = spiritual fruit)
2) Before we are Christians, we are _________ to sin. (slaves)
3) Our part is patient yielding, God’s part is _________ . (pruning)

Thank you for taking the time to read what your child is learning. Next week we will wrap up this unit with an overview of the Fruit of the Spirit found in Galatians 5. Be sure to put the DiscipleTown Table Talker on your table and take a few moments three times this week to engage your kids in conversations about how to produce spiritual fruit!

Making Disciples for Jesus,

[Your Name]
Additional Ideas

- **Life Saver Race**  Choose two kids from the audience. Show a string licorice with a Life Saver tied in the middle. Put one end of the string in each contestant’s mouth. They will both race their way to the center with their hands behind their backs. Whoever gets the Life Saver in his or her mouth wins. You can do this race several times. (Refer to the licorice as a vine.)

- **Stare Wars**  Choose a child and have him or her sit on a chair facing the audience. Choose something directly in front of the child to “fix your eyes upon.” For twenty seconds, try to get him or her to look away from the object or laugh. Do not actually get between the child and the object. You can do anything to distract the player except to block the view or touch him or her. Use funny props or masks, almost tickle, get close, but never touch. If the child can keep focused for twenty seconds, he or she wins. When you are finished with the activity, talk about why it was so hard. Talk about the things in this world that distract us from God. **Even things that aren’t sins can distract us. If we can keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, we will have peace. This is because we remember that He is in control of the whole world. It is hard to focus on Jesus, but if we do, it will help us live for Him.**
DIRECTOR’S NOTES
The words in italics are notes for you and your puppeteers; they are not to be read aloud.

[Puppet has all kinds of fake/plastic fruit attached to his body.]

Leader: Um, [puppet name], I’m almost afraid to ask. You aren’t the new spokesperson for Fruit of the Loom, are you?

Puppet: What’s Fruit of the Loom?

Leader: Never mind. So, what is with all the fruit?

Puppet: I was reading the Bible—John chapter 15 to be exact—and Jesus said that if He didn’t see fruit from me, He would cut me off and throw me into a fire!

Leader: Now, wait a minute...

Puppet: Felt doesn’t do so well in a fire.

Leader: [Chuckles.] I imagine not. But you don’t have to worry.

Puppet: [Points to different fruit.] Oh, I know I don’t. I have oranges and bananas and grapes and apples...

Leader: That’s not what Jesus meant. He was talking about spiritual fruit.

Puppet: Oh. Like from Galatians 5?

Leader: Very good. And I’ve seen some of that fruit in you, lately.

Puppet: You have?

Leader: Why, sure. I saw peace in you the other day, when you found out you were out of peanut butter.

Puppet: You’re right. I usually freak out when my extra-crunchy is all gone.

Leader: And you showed me kindness when I was upset about...um, you know.

Puppet: When your High School Musical trading cards got wet?

Leader: Um, yeah. You were very consoling and [Looks at audience.] didn’t laugh at me.

Puppet: Yeah, that definitely came from the Spirit.

Leader: So, you see? You are producing spiritual fruit. Jesus will not cut you off as long as you remain in Him.

Puppet: No doubt I’ll do that!

Leader: Good.

Puppet: Felt doesn’t do so well in a fire, you know.

Leader: You said that already.

Puppet: Well, it bears repeating.

*PUPPET: Develop a puppet character to use regularly. The children will get to know the personality and enjoy these regular visits. Dee, Cy, and Paul puppets are available at DiscipleLand.com
Each DiscipleTown Unit will teach your kids an essential "how to" skill to become victorious disciples of Jesus!