



The Vine and the Branches

Luke 15:1-5

"Hello, Rangers!" Safari Sam greeted the campers standing at the edge of the forest path. "What'cha doin'?"

"We're waiting for Ranger Reggie..." began Billy.

"...so we can start our hike," Lewis finished. "He's gonna' show us how to find berries to eat in the woods."

"Yeah, he went to get buckets so we can collect the berries," Natalie added.

"Sounds like fun! I think I'll join your hike." Safari Sam stared off in the distance and said, "That reminds me of the time I was hunting for the elusive Wamamamo berries in the jungles of the Amazon rainforest. Why I..."

"...wrestled a giant monkey for ten hours so you could taste just one of those rare berries." Ranger Reggie said as he walked up behind them carrying a stack of shiny tin pails.

"Well, actually, it was an anaconda snake. But I got the best of 'em!" Safari Sam bragged. He looked as if he would continue telling his story, but Ranger Reggie waved for the campers to follow him and asked, "Safari Sam, as we walk, can you tell us about the Creature Feature for today's show?"

Safari Sam fell into step alongside Ranger Reggie. "How 'bout I read the parable about the vine and the branches and you try to figure it out?" he offered to the campers.

"Great idea!" Ranger Reggie agreed.

Safari Sam took his little New Testament Bible from his front shirt pocket and flipped through the pages as he walked. He nearly stumbled over a rock as he found John 15.

"In this story, Jesus stands for the Vine and God is the Gardener." Ranger Reggie explained as he reached out to steady his stumbling friend.

"Are you saying Jesus was a little vine like this?" Lewis asked, as he stopped and pointed at a tiny green shoot that was just starting to climb up a tall pine tree.

"Oh no! Not a little vine." Ranger Reggie led the group towards a tall wire fence covered with big, green, heart-shaped leaves. "More like the type of vine that grow grapes. They are

very large vines—like a tree; they look like this.” He pushed aside some of the leaves to show a thick, twisted brown vine weaving its way up a fence post. Smaller shoots from the vine wound around the wire of the fence. The vine and its branches were so big they covered the entire fence.

“That’s a big vine!” Billy exclaimed. “Are those the branches? Those are like tree branches.”

Ranger Reggie nodded. “And that’s what we get to be. We are the branches!”

“How are we the branches?” Amanda demanded, “I don’t look like that.”

“It’s a parable, silly!” Natalie chimed in. “You know, a picture story to help us understand how God’s kingdom works.

“Well, sometimes Amanda gets so mad, she does turn a little green!” Billy snickered. Lewis laughed as Amanda stuck out her tongue at Billy.

“Rangers, Rangers! Be kind to each other!” Ranger Reggie commanded.

Safari Sam gave the Bible to Ranger Reggie and removed a pair of small pruning shears from one of the many pockets in his tan pants. He pushed a pair of small glasses onto the bridge of his nose and carefully examined the grape vine. “The Bible says Jesus is the Vine, we are the branches, and God is the Gardener. He cuts off every branch that doesn’t bear fruit,” he explained.

“He cuts off the branches?! Why would he do that?” Lewis exclaimed.

“He wants them to bear fruit,” Safari Sam explained. He pointed to one branch that was heavy with speckled purple grapes. “He even prunes the branches that do bear fruit.”

“What does prune mean?” Billy asked.

“Prune means to take off any part of the branches that slow down their growth.” Ranger Reggie answered as Safari Sam began to trim some of the branches.

“Why would God trim the ones that bear fruit?” Amanda asked.

“When you cut back healthy branches, they bear even more fruit!” Ranger Reggie said as he held up one of the branches that was loaded with grapes.

“So pruning is a good thing,” Safari Sam concluded, “but, no one wants to be cut off completely from the vine.” He pointed to each place on the vine where he had trimmed a branch. “See how I left plenty of each branch connected to the vine? Now, it will grow longer and stronger and bear even more grapes! The branch can’t grow again unless it is still attached!”

“That’s exactly what Jesus said in the parable!” Ranger Reggie read from the Bible, “Jesus said, ‘Remain in Me, and I will remain in you. No branch can bear fruit by itself; it must remain in the vine. Neither can you bear fruit unless you remain in Me.’”

Safari Sam stood up and stated proudly, "There's your Creature Feature!"

The campers shrugged and whispered to one another, "What creature?"

"Well, it's the bear, of course!" Safari Sam said.

"The Bear!?" Ranger Reggie exclaimed. "What does a bear have to do with vines and branches?"

"Well, if we stay connected to Jesus we will *bear* fruit!" Safari Sam smiled.

Ranger Reggie chuckled, "That's not what 'bear fruit' means. It doesn't mean a grizzly bear! It means to grow fruit—spiritual fruit."

"Spiritual fruit? What's that? Like godly grapes, holy apples, and passion fruit?" Billy joked.

Lewis laughed.

"No, no!" Ranger Reggie replied. "Spiritual fruits are the wonderful things Jesus does through each of us. When we stay close to Him, our good deeds and attitudes build God's kingdom!" He read,

"Jesus said, 'I am the Vine; you are the branches. If a man remains in Me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from Me you can do nothing.'"

"So, if you remain with Jesus you will bear fruit!" Lewis exclaimed.

"And without Him, we are fruitless!" Natalie added.

Billy's face brightened with understanding. "So, we stay with Jesus and help God's kingdom grow!" he shouted.

"Absolutely!" Reggie agreed with a wide smile. "Alright, Camp Rangers, get out those pails and let's collect some of this delicious fruit. Our camp cook has promised to bake some into a grape cobbler for dessert!"

Moments later, grapes were piling into the buckets as the campers thought of ways to stay close to Jesus so they, too, could bear fruit.