



# LEAD COURAGEOUSLY -STAY CONNECTED-

## CHECK-IN

**How are you? Where have you seen God working in your life in the last week? And... in our scripture for today, Jesus was on a fruit-metaphor kick. So, what is your all-time, absolute favorite fruit? Are you a traditionalist, munchin' on apples or oranges? Maybe you're a berry-boss, partaking of the straw-, black-, rasp-, or huckle- varieties? Or do you lean exotic, favoring something like mangoes or dragonfruit? Discuss!**

## OPENING PRAYER

**Source of Courage, help us to remain connected to you.  
Embolden us to lead others into your service.**

## INTRODUCTION

*Loving others* was an exceptional place to start. Living that out by *serving joyfully* was a great follow-up. But your recent

revelation that all this needs to be taught, that it's up to you lead others, came with a sudden wave of panic. "I'm not a leader," you think. "Who would listen to what I have to say?" You lift your eyes to the heavens, and pray, "God, how will I ever lead anyone to do this, too?" As you gaze skyward, waiting for answer, you realize you're sitting under an apple tree. The fruit attached to the tree looks healthy, thriving, and... well... delicious! You look around your feet, and scattered across the ground are apples that fell from their stems, separated from the tree, beginning to spoil, never having had the chance to reach their full potential. "Okay, God, I get it." To produce healthy fruit, fruit that will endure, fruit that can be shared, it must stay connected The Source of Life. "Wow, you're good with the metaphors, there God. If I'm going to be a good apple, I gotta stay hooked to the tree. I need to make sure I'm connected to you, and show others how to connect to you, too. Got it." The characteristic of *leading courageously* begins to take shape.

**Setup Question: What prevents you from taking on leadership roles? Is it the vulnerability that comes with making what could be the wrong decision? Perhaps it's the insecurity of feeling like you have nothing to offer? (Spoiler: you have lots to offer!) Maybe it's simply the amount of additional work in your already packed schedule? What scares you most about leadership?**

## SETUP

Otra vez! (That's Spanish for "One more time!") Let's review the vision statement given to us by the United Methodist Council of

Bishops that has been helping us understand what it means to be a follower of Jesus Christ...

**The United Methodist Church forms disciples of Jesus  
Christ who, empowered by the Holy Spirit,  
LOVE BOLDLY, SERVE JOYFULLY  
AND LEAD COURAGEOUSLY  
in local communities and worldwide connections.**

Remember, these three characteristics have become a litmus test for us. If you're a new Christian, it's a great way to ask, "okay, I decided to follow Christ, what do I do now?" If you've been a disciple for a while, it's a measuring stick, "have I been doing what I'm supposed to be doing? Where can I improve?" Do these three things, and you're doing good and doing it well. Today, we continue our discussion of the third characteristic, *leading courageously*. Last week, we saw how we were each chosen to be a leader... it's non-optional. And so, we ended with the question, "where am I called to lead?"

**Question 1: Did you come up with an answer to that question? What is the specific lasting fruit that you are called to produce? What gifts has God given you that you are supposed to pass on? Who are you called to lead?**

## SCRIPTURE

If that question made you uncomfortable? Good, it should. Leading is tough. It can be nerve-wracking. It opens us up to criticism and critique. It puts weight on our shoulders for the

success or failure of an endeavor. The cliché, “burden of leadership” is a cliché for a reason. It made Jesus’s followers uncomfortable, too. After he gave the command, “go and produce lasting fruit,” (John 15:16 NLT) he then talks for then 5 minutes about how difficult it’s going to be. He talks about how they’ll be thrown out of cities and churches, how they’ll be mocked and persecuted, how their own people will want to kill them. (Great motivational speech there, Jesus.) He knows they’ll need courage. And where does that courage come from? Well, he leans into the fruit metaphor...

**Read John, chapter 15, verses 1 through 5.**

Where do we find the courage to lead others? How do we produce lasting fruit? By being a branch that stays connected to The Vine. (Read that again, that’s important stuff.)

**Question 2: Imagine you were a disciple listening to Jesus give this metaphor. Does it make sense? What do you think Jesus meant? If you were preaching a sermon on this passage, what would be the point you would try to get across?**

## REFLECTION

“Stay connected to the vine.” It’s a good line. Looks good on a coffee mug or a church-merch t-shirt. But, it’s a metaphor that needs some explanation, right? *How* do we stay connected? What does it take to be rooted in our relationship to Christ? There are two answers to this question when it comes to

leadership. First, Jesus's last quip in verse 5 can come across a little harsh, but it makes an important point. "Apart from me you can do nothing." (v5) Jesus wasn't trying to be belittling. He was simply suggesting, "leadership isn't about you. If you stay rooted in me, I'll do the rest. You aren't responsible for the outcome. If you let me use you, I'll do the rest." You can step out on faith and lead, because you can trust Jesus to do the work.

Okay, then... if Jesus is taking responsibility for the outcome, what is our responsibility? Well, usually, when this passage is used in a sermon, staying connected to The Vine is equated to spiritual disciplines. That is, you connect to Christ through things like regular worship, Scripture study, partaking in the sacraments, being involved in church community, and building a habit of prayer. And that's great... do those things! But for our purposes today, in the context of leadership, staying connected to the vine simply means... say, "yes." If God will be faithful to do the work, then all we have to do is show up. Let God use you. Say, "yes!" When God lays on your heart to step up and lead... lead. When God whispers in your ear to take on a new role or do that thing you've been thinking about doing... do it. When God gives you an idea that will help others learn to love and serve like you know how to do... make it happen! Leading courageously means saying, "yes," when God puts out the call. Show up. Say, "yes."

**Question 3: Sit quietly for a few moments and answer the question, "What is God calling me to do?" Ask God to make**

**the request clear, to reveal the person or persons to whom you are called, and to give you an idea of the path to make it happen. After a few moments, maybe take some time to write it down, then share with the group.**

## CLOSING

As we said last week, you are chosen. God has a leadership role for you... Sorry, it's non-optional. God has something for you to do, a role that only you can play, a way to lead in his church. Your job this week is to say, "yes," knowing that all you have to do is show up, and Jesus will produce the fruit. Stop fighting the role God has called you to play. Step up and lead. Be courageous, knowing that if you stay connected to the vine, by simply showing up, saying yes, God will be faithful to produce the fruit. Go and lead *courageously*.

**Take some time to share prayer requests or celebrations and close in prayer.**