

COMMUNION

LEADER'S GUIDE

PREPARING TO LEAD COMMUNION

- Determine how you will take communion. The three most common ways are
 1. using communion packets
 2. partake the bread and juice separately
 3. partake the bread and juice together by dipping the bread into the juice/wine (commonly called intinction).
- If you need communion packets, just let us know, and we will supply them.
- If you decide to buy bread and juice on your own, here are some things to consider:
 - Find a plate and cup(s) for the bread and wine/grape juice. If you are not dipping the bread into the cup, you'll need to get small cups for everyone to use.
 - Naan or Pita bread works well; I have also used Challah or Hawaiian bread.
 - Concord Grapes are my favorite. If your conscience allows, you might also use wine. My favorite wine is a port--a strong flavor yet sweet to taste.
- Spend some time in prayer, asking the Spirit to lead you as you lead others in taking communion, and be open to Scripture that the Spirit might bring to your mind.

NONBELIEVERS & CHILDREN

- Communion is a meal for believers only. Scripture warns us to partake in communion without faith (1 Cor. 11:28-29).
- If a non-believer visits my Community Group, I usually forgo taking communion and wait until another time.
- If an unbeliever regularly attends your Community Group, and you would like to take communion, I would talk to the person on the side and explain the meaning of communion. This is a wonderful opportunity to share the gospel. If someone present is not sure if they don't have faith in Christ, then ask them to wait until they do have faith in Christ.
- I would not give the elements to children who have not yet professed their faith in Jesus. If the child is old enough to understand the gospel, make sure you explain

the gospel in a way they can understand. I also love praying a blessing over any children present.

INSTRUCTIONS FOR DEEPER COMMUNION

You have an opportunity to “proclaim the Lord’s death” to one another in a more personal way.

- **Explain the Lord’s Supper** in your own words. If you don’t know what to say, you can read selected passages from above.
- **Ask everyone to think of one thing with which they are struggling**, it could be an unmet desire, a doubt or fear they might be experiencing, or an ongoing sin. Provide small sheets of paper and have them write their struggle on the paper.
- **Invite people to come to get the elements.** Tell them to hold the elements so we can take them together. And as they do, have them throw away their sheet of paper into the trash.
 - Instead of using a sheet of paper, consider doing a more intimate version: After each person shares their struggle, ask if anyone might have a gospel truth to share with them. For example, one person might say, “When you feel insufficient, Jesus is fully sufficient to meet you.” Or “As you feel alone, Jesus was completely alone and forsaken on the cross so that we would not ever be alone.” Or “I hear you struggle with people letting you down. In Jesus’ death and resurrection, he proves that God always keeps his promises.” As they speak these words, hand the elements to them. You will probably need to model how this works.
- **Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-24.** If I’m using communion packets, I just hold up the communion packets as I read. If I am using separate elements of bread and juice, I like to break the bread as I read verses 23-24, and pour the juice as I am reading verse 25.
- **Then invite them to partake of the bread and cup.**
- **Close with a prayer of thanksgiving.**

INSTRUCTIONS FOR A SIMPLE COMMUNION

- **Give some instructions.** Explain the Lord's Supper briefly. If you don't know what to say, you can read the first two paragraphs above. Make sure everyone knows that communion is a meal for those who have placed their faith in Jesus.
- **Pray that God would bless your time as you take these elements.**
- **Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-24.** You might want to break the bread at the same time. Then read v. 25 and pour the wine/grape juice into the cup.
- **Give out the elements.**
 - If you partake in the bread and wine separately, pass them around the room.
 - If you are dipping the bread into the wine, walk around the room person by person. As they partake, you might say a word of blessing, such as "The body and blood of Christ, given for you." Or "When you were powerless, Christ died for the ungodly" or some other Scripture reference.
- **Close with a prayer of thanksgiving.**

THEOLOGY OF COMMUNION

Communion (also known as the Lord's Supper or the Eucharist) is a core practice Jesus gave to his Church. The early church celebrated the Lord's Supper frequently and in homes (Acts 2:42-46, 20:7). So it is good to celebrate this meal on Sunday during the Worship Gathering, and it is also good for Community Groups to celebrate it in their homes.

Communion is a simple and profound meal that looks backward and forward, as well as upward, inward, and outward.

Backward Dimension

The night before Jesus was crucified, he celebrated the Passover meal with his disciples. That meal recalled God delivering his people from slavery. He did so by sending 10 plagues to Pharaoh, to let God's people go and worship him in the wilderness. The last blow was the night when God sent the Angel of Death to strike down the firstborn in every home, including Pharaoh. God, in his mercy, provided protection: every family that sacrificed a lamb and painted its blood over the doorway, God would "pass over" that home.

Here is what Jeff Vanderstelt says about this meal: "At his last meal with his disciples before his death, Jesus showed how every Passover was pointing to him. And at this meal, Jesus changed the Passover to the Lord's Supper as his meal. It became a meal at which we remember how he redeemed us out of slavery to sin and Satan by becoming the true and better sacrificial Lamb of God for us" (*Gospel Fluency Handbook*, 150).

So, when we celebrate Communion, we look *backward* and "do this in remembrance" of what Jesus has done for us on the cross.

Forward Dimension

The Lord's Supper looks forward. Paul tells us to "proclaim the Lord's death until he returns" (1 Cor. 11:26). Communion is a simple meal - there are only two elements: bread and wine with no main course. The reason why there is no main course is because we will one day feast with Jesus and all his people at the Wedding Supper of the Lamb (Rev. 19:6-9). And at that feast, not only will there be the best food and drink but death itself will also be swallowed up as the main course (Isaiah 25:6-8).

So, we celebrate Communion until he returns, looking *forward* to the largest, greatest party this world has ever seen.

UP-ward Dimension

The main focus of the meal is Jesus himself, not the bread or wine, not the partakers or the one administering the elements. Jesus himself is the host. He is the one who is spiritually present with us to minister to us when we take communion. Just consider how many words are connected to Jesus himself in 1 Corinthians 11: the Lord's Supper (v. 20),

the Lord's body (vv. 24, 27, & 29), the Lord's blood (vv. 25-27), the Lord's death (v. 26), and the Lord's cup (v. 27). Everything points to the Lord Jesus. He is what communion is all about. And during the meal, he says, "I am the bread of life, whoever comes to me shall not hunger, whoever believes in me shall not thirst" (John 6:35). Although Jesus is not literally or physically in the bread and wine, he is spiritually present to personally nurture our faith and make it stronger.

So, when we celebrate Communion, we look *upward* to Jesus himself as the personal host of the meal.

IN-ward Dimension

The word "communion" in the New Testament is *koinonia*, which refers to sharing life together that is greater than ourselves. Communion is an open table to be shared by all those who have faith in Jesus. It's unthinkable that healthy families don't eat together. So when we partake of the body of Christ in heaven, we actually become more of the body of Christ on earth. Because this is such a high honor, Paul admonishes us to examine ourselves to see if we discern the body of Christ (1 Cor. 11:28-29). When we discern Jesus' body rightly, we partake in a worthy manner. Here are three ways one can rightly discern the body of Christ:

- one believes in Jesus as his or her Lord and Savior
- one belongs to the spiritual body of Christ, the church
- one is reconciled with another member of the body whom they have offended (Matt. 5:21-24)

So, we look *inwardly* to examine our faith so that we might celebrate with the rest of Jesus' family.

OUT-ward Dimension

Finally, in communion, we "proclaim the Lord's death" (1 Cor. 11:26). We celebrate communion, we proclaim this gospel not only to each other but also to those not yet of the faith. The early church leaders saw this outward dimension when they taught leaders to pray for the bread: "*As this broken bread was scattered upon the hills and, having been gathered together, became one, so may your church be gathered together from the ends of the earth into your kingdom*" (Didache 9:4). What a beautiful picture! Jesus is gathering all his people from every tribe, tongue, ethnicity, and language into one body - one family.

So, when we celebrate Communion, we look *outward* with hope, awaiting the day that God will make his body united and one.