



.....

Thanks so much for being willing to initiate a time of Communion with those in your circle of friendship and faith, whether it's with your family, a group of friends, your small group, at a church committee meeting, a music rehearsal, a prayer meeting, etc.

.....

The resources we've provided on the next 2 pages are designed to walk your group through Communion with *{hopefully}* as much ease as possible. Content-wise, everything is provided, including an introduction, explanation, prayer, directions, etc. and may be used exactly as presented, but - since you know your group best - do feel free to deviate from the outlined plan if that would be most helpful for you {ie: you may wish to provide room for discussion or conversation after certain segments, or open up a prayer time for everyone to participate, etc}. Since doing communion in smaller groups is a relatively new endeavor for us as a church, expect that it may feel unfamiliar {and potentially awkward}. A certain measure of discomfort always accompanies us when we enter into unknown territory, so please rest assured that any uneasiness you may experience is not an indication of whether or not you're doing it 'right'... in fact, if you feel a sense of discomfort, would you allow that feeling to guide you back to one of the basic truths found in Communion: that Christ alone provides all that we need, and He can be trusted to draw our hearts to Him.

Here's how we've set it up.....

- * If you look at the following papers, you'll notice that there are 2 pages of content, with a total of 12 numbered sections {go ahead and take a little look}
- * As a way to get everyone in your group involved in a non-threatening way, we thought you could cut along the dotted lines, dividing the Communion 'ceremony' into the 12 numbered sections, fold each section up, put them into a bowl, then invite everyone to draw a piece of paper {or more – depending on how many people are in your group}
- * Once everyone has their papers, start with whoever has Section #1 and work your way through the service that way, as each person reads their portion.
- {* Again – as mentioned above – feel free to use a different method or format if that would be most suitable}

What you'll need to have ready prior to meeting.....

- * A loaf of bread {unsliced would be great}
- * A bottle of grape juice {or mutually agreed-upon alternative}
- * A cup for each person – fill the cups before you begin the service {note: if you'd like to use the small communion cups that we use in church services, just swing by the church office to pick some up}
- * An idea of how you're going to approach the content: will you have cut the content into the 12 different sections for everyone to pull a section {or 2} out of a bowl to read? Will you have just a couple of people read the various portions... if so, do you have enough copies? Etc.

It's our prayer that you and your group will come away from your time together strengthened and refreshed in spirit, and that you will have found yourselves drawn into closer communion with Christ and with one another.

1. As brothers and sisters in Christ, we want to celebrate the Lord's Supper together today. Communion is an open invitation extended to all those who have faith in Jesus Christ as their Savior and Lord, and, as followers of Christ, we're free to observe the Lord's Supper as often as we wish, whenever two or three or more are gathered in His name.

2. The single celebration of communion focuses our attention in a few different directions: First of all, it asks us to *look backward* to the crucifixion and resurrection of Jesus – the defining moment in our history. We remember that, when we accepted His sacrifice, we escaped from death and the slavery of sin and were transferred into life and freedom from condemnation. Christ's death and resurrection gave us a brand new identity, making us children of God! We partake of the Lord's Supper to remember what Christ has done {Luke 22:19}.

3. Communion also invites us to *look into our hearts*: it's a picture of our *present* relationship with Jesus Christ. The crucifixion has a continuing significance for all who have taken up their cross to follow Jesus. Galatians 2:19-20 reminds us that '*I have been crucified with Christ. I myself no longer live, but Christ lives in me. So I live my life in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me.*' We continue to participate in His *death* through communion, because every day we are participating in His *life*. The Lord's Supper is a reminder of Jesus' real and abiding presence with us: He continues to forgive us, to extend grace and mercy, and to strengthen us to serve Him. When we're aware that Jesus lives in us, we also pause to think what kind of home we are giving to Him. We allow Him to change our lives so that we live the way He wants us to. Paul wrote, '*A man ought to examine himself before he eats of the bread and drinks of the cup*' {I Cor. 11:28}. The Lord's Supper helps us look inward, to examine our hearts.

4. As we examine our inner lives, we also need to *look around* – to other people – to see whether we're treating one another in the way that Jesus commanded. If you are united with Christ, and I am united with Christ, then we're united to each other, too. The Lord's Supper, by showing us our current participation in Christ, also shows us our participation and fellowship with each other. Paul writes in I Cor. 10:17 that, '*because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all partake of the one loaf.*' The Lord's Supper is a picture of the Truth that we are one body in Christ, one with each other, and we have responsibilities toward one another.

5. Lastly, the Lord's Supper beckons us to *look forward*, to anticipate the future when Christ will return. Jesus said He would not drink the fruit of the vine again until He came in the fullness of the kingdom, and whenever we participate in the Lord's Supper, we're reminded again of His promise to return. This is a celebration of Hope!
{*Let's take a few moments to quietly reflect on the past work of Christ in our lives, as well as remembering that He promises to return*}

6. We celebrate the *past* action of Christ's death and resurrection, the *present* and ongoing work of Christ in our lives, and the *future* hope of Christ's return by sharing the bread and the cup together, and there are different names for this event:

* **The Lord's Supper** is one expression we use, and it conveys that Jesus Himself is the host of the supper, and that we're His guests. He calls the bread 'His body' and the cup 'His blood' {or the new covenant of His blood}, and He has good reason for these words: He wants to teach us that – just like food and drink feed and sustain our physical, temporary life – His crucified body and poured-out blood feed and sustain our souls for eternal life.

* The term **Eucharist** {yoo-ka-rist} is based on the Greek word for 'thanksgiving', and it reminds us that this is a feast of gratitude. The power of the celebration doesn't lie in our ability to think hard about Jesus' death and our sin, but in the way God uses the celebration to remind us again of His grace, goodness, and faithfulness.

7. One last term for this event is the word **Communion** which highlights the element of community and unity that we experience with both Christ and our brothers and sisters in Christ when we share this meal together.

It's a sign of our covenant relationship – a relationship built on commitment and promise.

* Our relationship with God in Christ is based on promises that He has made to us:

to love us, save us, and be faithful to us

* Our relationship with Christ includes promises that we have made to Him:

to love Him, follow and obey

* Our covenant relationship with Christ also extends to include promises made to the body of Christ:

to love and serve each other

{Let's take a few moments to remember again the exchange of loving commitments made to us by Christ and our fellow believers...Let's also use this time to reflect on the promises that we've made to God: are we faithfully fulfilling the vows we've made to love and obey Christ, and to love and serve His children?}

.....

8. God is faithful and never breaks His promises, even when we are unfaithful and break *our* promises. We see within ourselves that we have sinned and that we all fall short of God's glorious standard. Yet now God in His gracious kindness declares us not guilty. He has done this through Christ Jesus, who has freed us by taking away our sins.

{Let's bow our heads for a brief prayer}:

Holy Father, You are so rich in mercy, and You loved us so very much that even when we were dead in our sins, You brought us to life when You raised Christ from the dead. You have identified us as Your very own, and we belong to You and to Your children. We come now and present ourselves before you, knowing that - in Christ - we are all one body, we have the same Spirit, and we have all been called to the same glorious future. You are the only God and Father, who is over us all, and in us all, and living through us all.

.....

9. *{Invite everyone to tear a piece of bread off the loaf...when everyone has a piece, read this portion}:*

Is not the bread that we break a sharing in the body of Christ? We, who are many, are one body, for we all share the same loaf. Take it and eat it, for this is Christ's body.

{eat the bread}

.....

10. *{Invite everyone to take a prepared cup...when everyone has a cup, read this portion}:*

Is not the cup for which we give thanks a sharing in the blood of Christ? The cup that we drink is our participation in the blood of Christ...Each of you drink from it, for this is Christ's blood, which seals the covenant between God and His people. It is poured out to forgive the sins of many.

{drink the cup}

.....

11. *{Let's pray}:*

Lord God, in deep gratitude for this moment, this meal, these people, we give ourselves to You.

Lead us out to live as changed people because we have shared the living bread and cannot remain the same.

Ask much of us, expect much from us, enable much by us, encourage many through us. Help us to live for Your glory, both as inhabitants of earth, and as citizens of heaven. Amen.

.....

12. *{Benediction}:*

May God Himself, the God who makes everything holy and whole, make us holy and whole, put us together – spirit, soul, and body – and keep us fit for the coming of our Master, Jesus Christ. The One who has called us is completely dependable. If He said it, He'll do it! Amen.

{1 Thess. 5:23-24}