

Lord's Supper Bible Study Leaders Guide

C A T E C H I S M

2.0

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Session One: The Lord's Supper in the 3 Gospels and 1 Letter of Paul

OPENING DISCUSSION – Favorite Meals

In this set of Confirmation 2.0 Bible studies, the Lord's Supper will be the topic. Before jumping into the Scriptures, take a few minutes to warm up with the following conversation starter:

- What is your favorite meal of all-time? (If time permits, work your way through the whole meal from appetizer to dessert.)

STUDY

Just as eating and drinking are essential for our bodies, eating and drinking is essential for our souls. We can't live without food and drink, and our Lord is gracious to provide us with what we need. Similarly, life with God is lived best when we receive what he provides us to eat and drink in the Lord's Supper.

In this first study, we will explore the Lord's Supper in its original scriptural contexts. It should come as no surprise that there is significant mention of the Lord's Supper in the Bible, and it never hurts to return to the story out of which our practice of the Lord's Supper rises.

In the fifth chief part of the Small Catechism, Luther tells where the truth about the Lord's Supper can be found. It can be found in the Scriptures. "Where is this written?" Luther says, "The holy Evangelists Matthew, Mark, Luke, and St. Paul write."

Leader Note: The outline of the study to follow will include portions of Matthew, Mark, and Luke. Noticing similarities and differences between the three accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper adds to our understanding. Depending on the size of your group and the time available, discern how you might best highlight where these accounts are the same and where they are different.

Read Matthew 26:17-29

Read Mark 14:12-25

Read Luke 22:7-23

Start with a few background questions.

- When do these events occur in the life and ministry of Jesus?
- Where are Jesus and his disciples when these events take place?

Compare and contrast the three readings.

- What similarities do you notice between Matthew, Mark, and Luke's telling of the story?
- What differences do you notice between Matthew, Mark, and Luke's telling of the story?

Take what you've read and tie it to your understanding of Jesus.

- What do these readings teach you about Jesus?
- What do these readings teach you about Jesus' disciples? (You can think of both the 12 disciples and disciples today?)

Take what you've read and tie it to your understanding of the Lord's Supper.

- What does Jesus say the bread is and what does Jesus say the cup is in each of the Gospel readings?
- What is significant about what Jesus says regarding the bread and the cup?
- What do these verses teach you about the Lord's Supper?
- What questions do you still have?

Compare and contrast the readings to celebrations of Communion in your congregation's worship service.

Leader Note: For this next section, it would be a great thing to be able to have hymnals or copies of the Communion liturgy to share with your group so participants can compare the texts side by side.

- What similarities do you notice between the text of the Gospels and the Communion service?
- What differences do you notice between the text of the Gospels and the Communion service?
- What did this exercise teach you about the Lord's Supper generally and what did this exercise teach you about the Communion services you've been a part of more specifically?

In addition to these three Gospel accounts, there is one more place in the New Testament where the institution of the Lord's Supper is mentioned with explicit detail. St. Paul talks about it in 1 Corinthians.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26

Start with what you can notice in the text.

- From whom does Paul say he received what he is now delivering to the Corinthian Christians?

Compare and contrast what Paul says to the language of the three Gospel accounts.

- What is similar? What is different?

Compare and contrast what Paul says to the language of a Communion service.

- What is similar? What is different?
- What does this passage add to your understanding of what the Lord's Supper is and how you participate in the Lord's Supper?

CLOSING

For Lutheran Christians, Scripture serves as the source for our practice of the faith. We aren't making it up as we go. We look to God's Word to form and shape what we do. Our practice of the Lord's Supper comes straight out of the Scripture. Everything we confess about the Lord's Supper comes out the Scripture too.

With some scriptural context in mind, we will turn in the next study to the larger story of salvation being rehearsed and retold each time we gather around the altar.

For a closing prayer, you might consider using Psalm 145:15-19

- ¹⁵ The eyes of all look to you,
and you give them their food in due season.
- ¹⁶ You open your hand;
you satisfy the desire of every living thing.
- ¹⁷ The Lord is righteous in all his ways
and kind in all his works.
- ¹⁸ The Lord is near to all who call on him,
to all who call on him in truth.
- ¹⁹ He fulfills the desire of those who fear him;
he also hears their cry and saves them.

SESSION 2 – The Lord's Supper in the Context of the Passover

OPENING DISCUSSION – Family Traditions

The previous study explored the Lord's Supper in its New Testament context, examining passages from the Gospels and one of Paul's Letters. This study will come at the Lord's Supper through the context of the Passover. Passover was one of the chief festivals celebrated by God's people every year. Thousands of years after the first celebration of the Passover, Jesus reclined with his disciples to share the same meal and to institute what we now share as the Lord's Supper.

A strong Passover tradition had been passed down through the generations of God's people. With tradition in mind, engage a brief conversation about the following:

- What is a tradition your family shares?
 - What do you do?
 - Where does the tradition come from or how did it get started?
 - How long have you been sharing the tradition?
 - What would life be like if you suddenly stopped doing that particular tradition?

STUDY

There are many important events in the Old Testament, but one of the most important episodes in the Old Testament is the Exodus from Egypt. In the Exodus, the LORD hears the cries of his people and rescues them out of the house of slavery. The LORD shows his power over Pharaoh and the gods of Egypt. The LORD works in mighty ways to show that there is no one like him. This story of deliverance would become (and still is) a story that the people of God return to again and again so that they might remember it, tell it, and live it.

This is why the people of God came together annually to observe the Passover festival. Gathering for the festival was a way of remembering, telling, and living the story again. Celebrating Passover year after year was a way to hand the story down through the generations. Jesus himself remembered, told, and lived out this story.

Read Exodus 12:1-6

- During what part of the year will Passover take place?
- What kind of lamb are the people supposed to take? Why do you think this is significant?

Read Exodus 12:7-13

- What does the Lord say the purpose of the blood is?
- How does the Lord say that the people should eat the meal?
- How would you react to the Lord's instructions about the Passover if you were one of the Israelites?

The Lord also intended for his people to celebrate this feast year after year, teaching the story to future generations of his people. Even at its institution, the Lord commands his people to keep telling the story.

Read Exodus 12:24-28

- For how long does the Lord command his people to observe the rite of Passover?
- What does the Lord expect children to ask? Why do you think the Lord expects this to happen?

Think about your own life of faith now. The life of faith lived out by Christians today has been passed down to them by generations ahead of them.

- What moments from your own life can you remember when you asked a question like, "Why do we do _____ in church or as the people of God?"
- What questions like that do you still have?
- What is something you can point to in your life of faith that has been passed down to you from previous generations?

Now, turn back to Exodus to read about the details of the Lord delivering his people.

Read Exodus 12:29-32

- What does the Lord do to the Egyptians?
- What does Pharaoh say to Moses and Aaron?

The Lord flips the script for his people. Pharaoh, who had positioned himself in the place of God, is shown to be inferior to the true God. The Egyptians, who had been in the position of power, find that the Israelites now have a serious upper hand.

Read Exodus 12:33-36

- What do the people of Israel take with them?
- What do the people of Israel take from the Egyptians?
- How would you feel if you were one of the Israelites in this moment?

Read Exodus 12:37-44

- How long were the Israelites living in Egypt?
- What kind of night is the night of Passover called in verse 42? What do you think a "night of watching" means?

For generations, Passover had been a night of celebration and remembrance for the people of God. Passover marked the Lord's greatest act of deliverance and victory. It was a story worth telling over and over again so the people of God would always remember the Lord and what he had done for them.

Today, Christians gather around the table of Lord to celebrate the Lord's Supper. Whenever they gather for the Lord's Supper they are marking the Lord's greatest act of deliverance and victory. They share a story that is worth telling over and over again.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (This is a repeat passage from the previous study, but it is worth reading again.)

- How do you see teachings and practices of the Lord's Supper being handed down to future generations of Christians in what Paul says?
- What does Paul say the people of God "proclaim" when they eat the bread and drink the cup?
- If you had to proclaim/tell the story of Jesus' death in your own words, how would you tell it?
- How is this the greatest story of deliverance?
- What similarities can you note between the story of Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection and the story of the Passover?
- For how long will the people of God keep proclaiming Jesus' death?

CLOSING

The Christian practice of celebrating the Lord's Supper not only looks back toward the story of Jesus life, suffering, death, and resurrection, but it also looks forward to His appearing in glory. The story of deliverance and salvation is still awaiting its final chapter. When Jesus appears, he will reveal a new creation in which his people will dwell with him, something we already have through our baptismal faith in him. We will finally enjoy an eternal Promised Land, free from the oppression of Sin and Death.

As a closing prayer, you might consider using portions of the Song of Moses from Exodus 15.

"I will sing to the Lord, for he has triumphed gloriously;
the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea.
The Lord is my strength and my song,
and he has become my salvation;
this is my God, and I will praise him,
my father's God, and I will exalt him.

Your right hand, O Lord, glorious in power,
your right hand, O Lord, shatters the enemy.

"Who is like you, O Lord, among the gods?
Who is like you, majestic in holiness,
awesome in glorious deeds, doing wonders?"

"You have led in your steadfast love the people whom you have redeemed;
you have guided them by your strength to your holy abode.

You will bring them in and plant them on your own mountain,
the place, O Lord, which you have made for your abode,
the sanctuary, O Lord, which your hands have established.
The Lord will reign forever and ever."

SESSION 3 – The Lord's Supper in an Early Church Context

OPENING DISCUSSION

This study will explore the celebration of the Lord's Supper in the context of the first-century church gathered in the city of Corinth. Before jumping into that ancient context, take a few minutes to consider your own congregation's context.

Leader Note: Depending on your group's size, you may want to split into small groups or have this conversation as one big group.

From memory, see how much of your congregation's communion service you can list. You don't just have to recite the parts of the service. Try to think of as much detail about your experience of communion as you can. Here are some examples of the kinds of details you could consider as you aim to create a picture of the communion service from beginning to end:

- What parts of the liturgy can you recall?
- What do pastors, assisting ministers, and the congregation say and/or sing during the service?
- How and where do the pastors, elders, ushers, communion assistants, and other worship volunteers move during the service?
- How do members of the congregation move during the service?
- What changes do you notice on or around the altar?
- What do you see and hear as you go to communion?
- What do you see and hear as you return from communion?

STUDY

When it comes to the practice of communion among some of the earliest Christians, a lot of what we know comes from Paul's letter of 1 Corinthians. Writing to Christians in the Roman city of Corinth (modern-day Greece), Paul addresses their practice of the Lord's Supper.

It turns out that there are actually some significant issues Paul desires to fix among these Christians. As he aims to correct what they're doing, he gives readers of all times and places some important teachings about the Lord's Supper.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 10, Paul addresses a conflict that might arise for Christians living in pagan society. He urges the Corinthian Christians to flee from idolatry and remain united with Jesus. As he urges them to do so, he writes some important lines about how the Lord's Supper unites Christians with Christ.

Read 1 Corinthians 10:16-17

- What does Paul say that the cup of blessing we share is?
- What does Paul say the bread we break is?

This word for "participation" carries with it the ideas of fellowship and union. By sharing the cup and breaking the bread together, the people of God are both united with Jesus and united with one another. Just as there are many grains that come together to make a single loaf of bread, so there are many members of the body of Christ who are brought together by Christ himself. This is deep but is also very cool.

- How does the Lord's Supper enable you to participate in the body and blood of Jesus?
- How does the Lord's Supper unite you to everyone else who is communing with you?
- How will these verses impact you the next time you gather for the Lord's Supper?

In the next chapter of 1 Corinthians, Paul has some words of correction for the Corinthian Christians and their practice of the Lord's Supper. These Christians still had lots of room to grow in their life of faith.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:17-22

- What is the first issue that Paul points out? (See verse 18.)
 - For an even fuller picture what this issue looked like, reference 1 Corinthians 1:10-13.
- How do divisions like the ones Paul mentioned contrast with what Paul said about the Lord's Supper in 1 Corinthians 10?
- What are the other issues Paul points out in verses 21 and 22? Why would these be problems for Christians trying to worship together.

Having outlined some of the problems among the Corinthian Christians, Paul then outlines the practice of the Lord's Supper as he received it from the Lord.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26 (This should sound familiar. This passage has been in the two previous studies.)

- Reading this passage in context, what stands out to you?

Paul then elaborates on what it would look like to celebrate the Lord's Supper in a way that is in line with what he received from the Lord Jesus.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27-32

- What does Paul encourage a person to do before receiving the Lord's Supper? (See verse 28.)
- Why is the receiving the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner something to be concerned about? (See verse 27.)

This all leads to a conversation about how a person might receive the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner and how he or she might go about examining themselves beforehand too.

Martin Luther has some great words of guidance and encouragement in the *Large Catechism*. For Luther, the one who believes Jesus' words that his body and blood are "for you" is the one who receives the Lord's Supper in a worthy manner.

Now we must also consider who the person is who receives such power and benefit. Briefly, as we said about Baptism and in many other places, the answer is: It is the one who believes what the words say and what they give, for they are not spoken or preached to stone and wood but to those who hear them, those to whom he says, 'Take and eat,' etc. And because he offers and promises forgiveness of sins, it is part and parcel of the sacrament that it be received by faith. This faith he himself demands in the Word when he says, 'given for you' and 'shed for you,' as if he said, 'This is why I give it and bid you eat and drink, that you may take it as your own and enjoy it.' All those who let these words be addressed to them and believe that they are true have what the words declare...Now this is the sum total of a Christian's preparation to receive this sacrament worthily.¹

On the other hand, those who do not believe the words and promises of Jesus are not prepared to receive the Sacrament. Here's what Luther says in the *Small Catechism*

But anyone who does not believe these words or doubts them is unworthy and unprepared, for the words 'for you' require all hearts to believe.²

- What steps could you take to examine yourself in preparation for the Lord's Supper?
- What practices have you already found helpful preparation?
- How can you help and encourage one another prepare even better to receive the Lord's Supper?

As one small example of something that could be prayed before the Lord's Supper, *Lutheran Service Book* has the following prayer before communion in its front matter:

Dear Savior, at your gracious invitation I come to Your table to eat and drink Your holy body and blood. Let me find favor in your eyes to receive this holy Sacrament in faith for the salvation of my soul and to the glory of Your holy name; for you live and reign with the Father and the Holy Spirit, one God, now and forever. Amen.³

- What other words might you consider praying before you come to the Lord's Supper?

¹ Martin Luther, *The Large Catechism*, in *The Book of Concord*, edited by Robert Kolb and Timothy Wengert, (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2000), 470.

² Martin Luther, *Luther's Small Catechism* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2017), 29.

³ *Lutheran Service Book* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 2006), inside front cover.

Back to Corinth for just another moment. After encouraging the Corinthian Christians to examine themselves before the Lord's Supper, Paul offers a few final words of instruction.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:33-34

- What does Paul tell the Corinthian Christians to do in verse 33? How does this instruction correct the problem outlined in verses 18 and 21?
- What kinds of steps does your church already take to build a sense of togetherness and unity among God's people gathered at the Lord's table? What do you think it could do to encourage this even more?

CLOSING

For a closing prayer, you might consider using a portion of Psalm 116.

¹² What shall I render to the Lord
for all his benefits to me?

¹³ I will lift up the cup of salvation
and call on the name of the Lord,

¹⁴ I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people.

¹⁵ Precious in the sight of the Lord
is the death of his saints.

¹⁶ O Lord, I am your servant;
I am your servant, the son of your maidservant.
You have loosed my bonds.

¹⁷ I will offer to you the sacrifice of thanksgiving
and call on the name of the Lord.

¹⁸ I will pay my vows to the Lord
in the presence of all his people,

¹⁹ in the courts of the house of the Lord,
in your midst, O Jerusalem.

Praise the Lord!