

church  
discipleship  
campaign

Leader's Guide

# The Last Supper

Communion searches and strengthens our hearts.

*The Last Supper instituted the practice of Communion, which most of us celebrate on a regular basis in our churches. This study looks at how this practice initiates us into an understanding of God's redemption and release. It also exposes our hearts and feeds our deepest hunger.*



Scripture: [Matthew 26:17–30](#)

Based on: [The PreachingToday.com](#) sermon “The Dinner Guests of God,” by Lee Eclov.

## Part 1 Identify the Current Issue

*Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.*

### Ice Breaker **Food for Thought**

*Write the following words on index cards, one per card: yogurt, pizza, M & Ms, egg, salsa, peanut butter, lettuce, spaghetti.*

*Pass the cards around the group and have each person answer these questions: Which of the following foods best describes your life right now? Why? Which would you prefer your life to resemble? (As an alternative, it would be fun to bring each food item and place them on a platter, then pass the platter around as the group answers.)*

Mary Poplin, professor of education and Dean of the School of Educational Studies at Claremont Graduate University, attended a Methodist church as a child, but began searching other spiritual traditions, including Buddhism, Transcendental Meditation, even telepathic attempts to bend spoons.

Then she began teaching at Claremont, where a Christian friend encouraged her spiritual journey. Eventually, in 1993, she became a Christian. In her own words, this was the last step:

In January, my mother wanted to go to North Carolina to where she had grown up. We went to this little Methodist church, not because she was religious; she just wanted to see her friends.

When we got there, I was really moved to just go up to the altar and give my life to the Lord. It wasn't even an altar call. It was a communion call. The guy said, you don't have to be a member of any church to take communion. You just have to believe that Jesus Christ lived, that he died for your sins, and you have to want him in your life. And when he said that, I was so powerfully moved that I actually thought, even if a tornado rips through this building, I'm going to get that communion.

I took the communion, and I didn't even listen to the guy. I knelt down and said, "Please come and get me. Please come and get me. Please come and get me." And when I took the communion and I said that, I felt free. I felt like tons of things had been lifted off of me.

Communion—the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist—is a powerful experience. It is a meal that touches the soul. In Matthew 26, we look at the story that gives rise to our observance of the Lord's Supper. This passage helps us see what makes Communion such a uniquely significant meal.

### Discussion Starters:

**[Q]** What does Communion mean to you? Why do you take it?

## Part 2 Discover the Eternal Principles

### Teaching Point One: We're invited to a meal made from God's ancient recipes of redemption and release.

Read Matthew 26:17–30.

Jesus built Communion on the Passover (v. 17–19). For 1,500 years, the Passover had been teaching God's people the flavors of man's great need and God's great salvation. This sacred observance looks back to God's deliverance of the Israelites from the slavery of Egypt and the plague of death on all the firstborn in that land. It was a meal of strange recipes and flavors—salt water to remind people of the tears of slavery; bitter herbs, like horseradish, so people would remember the sour flavor of bondage; a fruit paste with cinnamon sticks to remind people of making bricks of clay and straw; a meal of lamb, commemorating how a lamb was killed for every household and its blood sprinkled on the doorposts, signaling the angel of death to pass over; flat bread, made without yeast, to remind God's people that they are to be both holy (no yeast—like sin puffing up their hearts) and ready to travel (such bread could be made quickly, and would travel well and wouldn't spoil); and then there were four cups of wine taken throughout the meal.

This custom was drawn from four promises made by God to Israel in Exodus 6:6–7: “I will bring you out ... I will free you from being slaves ... I will redeem you ... I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God.”

The Passover was precious to Jesus because it gave his disciples a taste of the ways of God. It reminded people that sin is a life of bondage like Egypt had been, and that sin's slavery is like making endless bricks from clay. It reminded them that death will pass over every house and our only protection lies not in our heritage or might, but in the blood of a sacrificial lamb. It reminded them that God is a redeeming God, buying people out of slavery; and that he is a liberating God, sending them out victorious and safe toward a land flowing with milk-and-honey promises.

These truths about life and God actually acquired a taste in Israel, where the people learned their theology at a table. And Jesus now wanted to teach his disciples that the Passover was the appetizer for the feast of salvation he would bring.

To this day, Communion is more precious to us when we realize that we taste the ancient recipes of God's redemption and freedom. Jesus brought his disciples to the Passover meal on the eve of his death so that their taste for salvation would be piqued.

**[Q]** How did Passover prepare Israel's heart for Jesus' coming?

**[Q]** In what ways is Communion like Passover?

*Leader's Note: Besides the above-mentioned things, both recognize our utter dependence on God for deliverance.*

**[Q]** What is the significance of the body and the blood in Communion? Why do you think Jesus chose to focus on those two things in his sacrifice?

**[Q]** What goes through your mind when you take Communion?

### **Teaching Point Two: We're invited to a meal that exposes our hearts.**

In verse 31, Jesus told his disciples, "This very night you will all fall away on account of me, for it is written, 'I will strike the shepherd, and the sheep of the flock will be scattered.'"

What a strange feast; it drove one guest away, unsettled all the others, and left the host with a broken heart. Communion is not a safe meal. What happened on that solemn night often happens still when this meal is eaten.

At this meal, the pretender cannot hide from the Lord's judgment. Jesus saw in Judas's heart what no one else could see. He saw the heart of a betrayer and a liar.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:27–32. Paul issued the solemn warning that this is not a meal to be trifled with, to be taken in an unworthy manner, because it can literally kill you. That doesn't mean that sinners cannot eat this meal—for if so it would be an empty table indeed! But it does mean that betrayers dare not dine here, that fakes and frauds eating this food eat poison.

At this meal, every disciple must invite the Lord's examination. The stunning news that a betrayer was among them grieved the disciples greatly, but it also prompted them all to ask, "Surely not I, Lord?" or as the NLT puts it, "I'm not the one, am I, Lord?" It was a question to which they each expected Jesus to say, "No, of course not." But apparently he never replied.

And the fact was, while only one would betray Jesus, they all would forsake him. John tells us that these disciples moved quickly from their shocked question, "Surely not I, Lord?" to an argument about which of them was the greatest. There is a sense in which this meal is intended to bring out the worst in us—not to provoke bad behavior, but to reveal the worst about our fickle hearts. Nancy Mairs wrote, "I don't partake because I'm a good Catholic, holy and pious