

# Way of Discipleship Small Groups

## Holy Communion 2: The meanings of sharing bread and wine



### Touching base (5 minutes)

Open in prayer as is helpful for your group.

If this is your first session take time to introduce yourselves and set any ground rules you want to for your time together.

If you met previously take the opportunity either as a group or in pairs to check in with each other about how your response from last time has gone.



### Opening question(s) (5 minutes)

Why do you think people experience sharing bread and wine in different ways?



### Understanding the information (15 minutes)

Share these thoughts in your own words or read them together:

Over time, the way we share bread and wine has developed in various ways – from simple and informal to more complex and structured. There are common elements to each expression (Word / People – peace / Sacrament / Sending out) but different names have been used which highlight the many gifts of this sacrament.



**Breaking bread.** As Luke writes in Acts (about A.D. 70) the early Christians used this description. The fact that they celebrated weekly showed that the link with the annual Passover meal was soon replaced. Nevertheless, for Christians the sense of the sacrificial act celebrated through bread and wine is central, with some seeing it as an actual sacrifice. In the Eucharistic Prayer, our worship is called ‘this our sacrifice of thanks and praise’.

**Lord’s Supper.** Paul used this in his letters from 45-60AD to describe the meal which included a liturgical recital of the words of Jesus.

**Eucharist.** This comes from a Greek word meaning “Thanksgiving”. It is found in an early document known as the Didache (Teachings) from as early as 60 AD. By 90AD this was the usual title being used, and the celebration no longer took place within a shared meal but as an act of worship on the first day of the week. It emphasises that at the heart of sharing in it is gratitude to God. We give thanks for all He has done, is doing and will do, and we give thanks to God for all our life experiences as individuals and a community.

**Mass.** This name was possibly used as early as the 5th century, but definitely by the 7th century. It probably comes from a word meaning sent. It emphasises how gathering to receive bread and wine leads to us being sent out to be with God and be disciples in the world. As Pope Francis says, “Worship is not worship if it doesn’t change us.”

**Holy Communion.** To be holy is to be set apart, and to commune is to have union with. This emphasises how when we share in the bread and wine that has been set apart, our union with Christ and with each other is strengthened in our lived experience. We are not observing something, but we are guests who are fed spiritually.

**Love Feast or ‘Agapé’** (a Greek word meaning ‘love’) meal. By the second century this would be a shared meal, separate from the Eucharist, often linked with providing food for the poor. It died out by the eighth century, but was revived by Methodists in the 18th century. It emphasises the hospitality of God - how in sharing bread and wine we are a family where all are invited in. A table signifies that you are welcome and that there is a place for you. It’s very human and it brings people together.

**Discuss:** Does one of these titles and meanings give you a fresh understanding of what sharing bread and wine can mean? In what way(s)?

## Seeing how it looks in real lives (10 minutes)

There is no video, but you are invited to discuss your experience of how sharing bread and wine has helped you follow Christ.



## Reading the Bible (15 minutes)

Read 1 Corinthians 11: 17-26 which describes the first Christians’ language and practice of sharing bread and wine.

Discuss the Discovery Bible Study questions:  
What does this passage teach me about God?  
What does this passage teach me about people?  
How does this passage call me to obey God?  
What might I do in response to this this week?



## Optional further material and questions

Share these thoughts or read them together:

Through the Eucharist God gives us a sacrament in which we find **Healing**. In the broken bread, Jesus’ brokenness is remembered, and we can identify our brokenness with his. But through His brokenness He brings salvation (or wholeness of life) and continues to do so. So, as we identify our brokenness with Christ’s, we can meet with Him through bread and wine in a way that can lead to wholeness again. **Hope**. At the last Supper Jesus looked forward to when He would “feast” with His disciples again.

A common picture in the Bible of our future hope beyond death is one of a banquet. For example the prophet Isaiah writes that, “the LORD Almighty will prepare a feast of rich food for all peoples, a banquet of aged wine—the best of meats and the finest of wines. (Isaiah 25:6). In the same way that for Jesus the last Supper was a way of looking forward to a time when He could drink with His friends “in my father’s kingdom”, sharing bread and wine can point us to our promised future banquet with God. Sacraments should help us imagine the world differently as the creation God is in the process of renewing. **Everyday life is valued.** Jesus takes ordinary things like bread and wine, transforms them and gives them out. In the same way the ordinary stuff of our lives is taken up into Jesus and given back to us. **A heightened sense of His presence.** God’s presence is everywhere, all the time. So how are sacraments different? They remind us specifically of how He has and is acting in our lives to make us whole. And they can intensify our “being with Him.” If God’s presence in creation is like fire, sacraments can perhaps be like the tip of a bunsen burner flame – the same presence, but experienced in a focussed way. Christians have different understandings of exactly how God’s presence is known in bread and wine. For some it is about a heightened sense of memory, and the presence of Christ is known through the whole service, and His people gathered together. The word and the sacrament are linked together. (Luther called the sacrament a “visible word”.) For others, the presence is particularly located in the bread and wine itself in a spiritual sense. For others, the bread and wine become the physical body and blood of Christ during the thanksgiving prayer. While this had led to disputes down the centuries, within the Anglican church these perspectives are held together – the key thing is that through sharing in the bread and wine we can be with God in a unique way.

Discuss: How much do you think our differences about God’s presence in the bread and wine matter?

## Responding to God’s leading (5 minutes)

Give people an opportunity to think about, “What might God be showing me and how might I respond?” They may like to write this down and/or share it with the group and/or share it with one other person. A friendly question is to ask each other, “Is there anything that would be helpful to ask you next time?”



## Group prayer (5 minutes)

Your words are life to us, Lord Christ.  
Even as we hunger for the tastes and textures and aromas of  
bread and wine spread before us,  
we pray that you would also daily increase  
our deep hunger for your words  
and your truth,  
that our own words and choices and actions  
this week would be shaped  
by your gracious revelation.  
Feed us, O Bread of Life.  
Amen



From “Every Moment Holy” by D.K. McKelvey



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## Additional notes:

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