



GODCONNECTS™

A COURSE IN CHRISTIANITY



LHM.ORG/GODCONNECTS

DISCUSSION GUIDE - SESSION 10

USING THE DISCUSSION GUIDE

This is an interactive study guide. We designed it to be flexible so it will fit both group and personal use. It includes links, which provide extra information on Internet sites where you can browse and dig as deep as you want.

A PDF discussion guide containing all 12 sessions, as well as single session guides, are available at www.lhm.org/godconnects.

To find the discussion guide on the DVD, load it into your computer (not your DVD player). You can right click the menu. Push "Open" instead of "Play" and you will pull up a list of files, which includes the discussion guide.



ABOUT US

God Connects is a ministry of Lutheran Hour Ministries (LHM). As a Christian outreach ministry, LHM supports churches worldwide, producing Christian radio and TV programming for broadcast, Internet and print communications, dramas, music, and outreach materials—all designed to reach unchurched people in the United States and more than 30 countries around the world. Lutheran Hour Ministries' flagship program, **The Lutheran Hour**, airs weekly on more than 1,400 stations and the American Forces Network. To learn more about this long-running Gospel program and LHM's other ministry resources, go to www.lhm.org.

CONTACT US

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INTRODUCTION

GodConnects: In a difficult and confusing world, God is connecting to you!

God, are You there?

Everyone, at some point, asks this question. It can come at moments of sterile reflection or in times of deep despair. "God, if You are there, why don't You show Yourself to me?" In this confusing world where authenticity is so elusive, it seems like we cannot connect to God.

We could not connect to God, but the good news is that God connects with us. He has been doing this from the beginning in amazing ways. The most direct way God connected to us is when He became one of us in Jesus Christ. When Jesus was on this earth, He was the very revelation of God as He taught and healed and loved.

Then to restore our connection to God which had been shattered because of sin, on the cross, Jesus willingly paid the penalty for our sins—in His own death! This is the most authentic, startling and determined love the world could have ever imagined.

Now God connects to us by revealing Himself in the Bible. This God-given book has an amazing story. It tells of God's constant and compassionate work to restore our relationship with Him.

GodConnects wants to share that story with you. *GodConnects* is a course that tells this unique, unequalled story. Whether you do not believe in Christ as Savior or want to deepen your faith in Him, as you delve into *GodConnects* you will explore what the Bible says about this remarkably loving God, and how this love gives direction and meaning to your life today and forever.

On this website, you can explore these questions of faith. You will find videos and other up-to-date media that take advantage of today's technology.

So let's get started

COMMUNION

Session 10: A Course on Christianity

Opening Prayer: Lord God, Heavenly Father, You gave us Communion as a great and precious gift. Teach me what I should know about it, so I may receive its great blessings. In Jesus' Name. Amen.

Holy Communion, the Lord's Supper, the Eucharist, the Sacrament of the Altar, the Breaking of the Bread ... these are all terms used interchangeably with "Communion." Whatever we call it, in this meal Jesus Christ is actually feeding His people with His very own body and blood. That is correct; you read that right! While this practice might sound a little peculiar, it comes directly from Jesus Himself. There is a powerfully divine purpose behind it or, rather, in, with, and under it!

10.1. WHAT IS COMMUNION, EXACTLY?

It is a Sacrament that gives us the true body and blood of Jesus Christ. His body and blood are joined with the bread and wine for us Christians to eat and drink. Don't worry; this is not cannibalism. It is a special, spiritual meal where the table is set by the Lord Jesus Himself with heavenly food. He instituted it on the night before He died, commanding His followers to continue practicing it. As the apostle Paul writes,

The Lord Jesus on the night when He was betrayed took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it, and said, "This is My body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." In the same way also He took the cup, after supper, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in My blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of Me." For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:23b-26)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why might some people find it hard to accept Jesus' body and blood are actually present in the bread and wine?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "The Sacrament of the Altar" (<http://lcms.org/Document.fdoc?src=lcm&id=1088>) is a pamphlet explaining various aspects of this teaching.

10.2. WHAT IS HAPPENING IN COMMUNION?

By the power of Christ's Word, in Communion, the formerly separated are joined together:

1. The body and blood of His Son Jesus Christ are joined to the bread and the wine, and given to the believer to eat and drink.

And He (Jesus) took bread, and when He had given thanks, He broke it and gave it to them, saying, "This is My body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of Me." And likewise the cup after they had eaten, saying, "This cup that is poured out for you is the new covenant in My blood." (Luke 22:19-20)

2. The believer is in union with Christ. By the very act of eating and drinking, Christ is in us and a part of us. This is possible only because this body and blood forgives the sins of the believer.

(Jesus said) "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:27b-28)

3. God's people are joined in union with other believers in Christ, both living and those already in heaven. During Communion it is as if the heavens are opened, and we share in a joyful meal, full of celebration and singing!

Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread. (1 Corinthians 10:17)

10.3. WHEN AND, PERHAPS, MORE IMPORTANTLY, HOW DOES THIS HAPPEN?

In the celebration of Communion (we don't know exactly when), the Lord miraculously unites His body with the bread and His blood with the wine. This "consecrated" bread and wine become a means by which God transports His forgiveness won on the cross to His people.

Now as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to the disciples, and said, "Take, eat; this is My body." And He took a cup, and when He had given thanks He gave it to them, saying, "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:26-28)

10.4. HOW CAN I REALLY BELIEVE THIS IS ACTUALLY HAPPENING?

Jesus is at the same time the Giver of the supper, and the Gift Himself in the bread and the wine. Christ's body and blood that flowed from the cross are really and truly present in the Sacrament. It is not humanly comprehensible to grasp how this precisely is possible, but by Holy Spirit-given faith we believe in the truth of Jesus' Words "This is My body, this is My blood."

The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ? (1 Corinthians 10:16).

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why is it hard for us to believe that this miracle happens at each celebration of Communion?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Where in the Bible does it say that the body and blood of Christ are present in the Lord's Supper?" (FAQ) (<http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine#present>)

10.5. SO, ARE THE BREAD AND WINE LITERALLY CHANGED INTO THE BODY AND BLOOD OF CHRIST?

No, the Bible clearly states the bread and wine are still present during the sacramental meal.

For as often as you eat the bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until He comes. (1 Corinthians 11:26)

Some Christians teach that every time Communion takes place, Jesus Christ is literally being sacrificed again, and again. The Bible says that everything was completed by the one sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

For by a single offering He (Jesus) has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified. (Hebrews 10:14)

Christ sacrificed Himself on the cross once to forgive the world of its sin. This one death (and resurrection) was sufficient for our forgiveness. In Communion Jesus brings us this same body and blood, which were given and shed for us in His bodily sacrifice on the cross.

And as they were eating, He (Jesus) took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, "Take; this is My body." (Mark 14:22)

10.6. WHO SHOULD TAKE COMMUNION?

People who desire to be reassured of God's forgiveness and presence should hunger and thirst for the Sacrament that most closely ties us to Jesus' sacrifice on the cross, which won our forgiveness.

Those who desire Communion carefully examine their hearts and repent of their sins in thought, word and deed. They believe the Good News of Jesus' victory over death, and that they are receiving the very body and blood of Christ.

Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:27-29)

Contrary to what some may think, Christians don't think of themselves as perfect people who never sin. We know we are sinners like everyone else. However, all believers who have been instructed in Communion, examine themselves, sincerely repent, and genuinely seek forgiveness of sins are welcome to commune. It does not matter how far away from God they may *feel*. If the slightest faith is there, God will comfort, forgive and strengthen it. Isaiah the prophet offers some comforting words of God's everlasting mercy:

A bruised reed He (God) will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench. (Isaiah 42:3a)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- What reassurance does it bring to know Communion is especially given to strengthen and increase faith of those whose faith is weak?

DIGGING DEEPER

- "Is Communion Necessary?" (audio, <http://media.lhm.org/lutheranhour/mp3s/QA7744PD.mp3>)

10.7. AM I CORRECT TO THINK THAT MAYBE NOT EVERYONE SHOULD TAKE COMMUNION?

Think of Communion like a powerful medicine Jesus Christ has prescribed for us. As long as it is taken in the way He instructs it will bring tremendous healing and benefit to our spirit, soul, mind and body. But if we misuse it, we will suffer harm.

See 1 Corinthians 11:27-29 above.

The ironic truth is that while it seems unloving for the church to exclude others from Communion, they actually are deeply concerned about the welfare of others. The church truly desires everyone to be able to partake of Communion. The big key, however, is receiving it rightly. Therefore the practice of "close" or "closed" Communion is to protect those who would be harmed by receiving the Sacrament in the wrong way.

What would be the loving thing to do if you saw someone smoking near an open container of gasoline? If you snatch the cigarette away, that person may not understand the action at first. But with an explanation of the danger, the response eventually would be one of gratitude.

Serving Christ's body and blood to someone who would be harmed by it would be just as unloving.

In addition, the Lord's Supper is intended to show the unity of the people who commune together. Therefore, those who commune together should be in agreement about the teachings of the church. (See Acts 2:42, 1 Corinthians 10:17.)

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Can you think of other examples when the best thing is to tell someone "no" to something they may desire or want to do?

DIGGING DEEPER

- Here's a brief [FAQ](http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine#partake) on who should participate in Communion. (<http://www.lcms.org/faqs/doctrine#partake>)

10.8. SO WHEN IS PERSON READY TO GO TO COMMUNION?

People are ready when

1.) They believe in Jesus Christ as true God and Savior and are willing to repent of their sins:

Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of the bread and drink of the cup. (1 Corinthians 11:28)

2.) They are willing to forgive those who sin against them:

(Jesus said) "If you do not forgive others their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses." (Matthew 6:15)

3.) They believe that Jesus' body and blood is truly present:

For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. (1 Corinthians 11:29)

4.) They can examine themselves: examples of those not able to examine themselves include young children, those who have not been instructed in the Christian faith, and those profoundly mentally impaired or unconscious.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Go through each of the four cases above. Would anyone in these situations really feel a true hunger or thirst for God's forgiveness in Communion?

10.9. WHAT IF I AM STRUGGLING WITH SOMETHING THE CHURCH CALLS A SIN, BUT I AM NOT SURE I AGREE?

It would be wise to discuss your thoughts on the matter, and seek further clarification from the Bible.

Any time a pastor or church community glosses over a sin, or looks the other way and gives Communion, the impression is being given that God is "okay" with the behavior, even if it destroys faith and leads to unrepentance.

Even worse, this license to sin can spread, causing other people to think lightly of committing this sin as well. This very thing happened in the church in Corinth. A person was living openly in a way that was contrary to the teachings of the Bible, and the church approved! Paul asked them to put the man out of the church.

It is actually reported that there is sexual immorality among you, and of a kind that is not tolerated even among pagans, for a man has his father's wife. And you are arrogant! Ought you not rather to mourn? Let him who has done this be removed from among you. ... When you are assembled in the Name of the Lord Jesus and my spirit is present, with the power of our Lord Jesus, you are to deliver this man to Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that his spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord. Your boasting is not good. Do you not know that a little leaven leavens the whole lump? Cleanse out the old leaven that you may be a new lump, as you really are unleavened. For Christ, our Passover Lamb, has been sacrificed. (1 Corinthians 5:1-2, 4-7)

Happily, by the time Paul wrote his next letter to the church in Corinth, this action had accomplished its Christ-given purpose: the man had repented of his sin.

For such a one, this punishment by the majority is enough, so you should rather turn to forgive and comfort him, or he may be overwhelmed by excessive sorrow. So I beg you to reaffirm your love for him. (2 Corinthians 2:6-8)

This reaffirmation of love included restoring their repentant brother to communion.

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Why do people confuse discipline with a lack of love and respect?
- How does church discipline reflect true love for our brothers and sisters?

10.10. WHAT IS THE BEST WAY TO EXAMINE MYSELF BEFORE TAKING COMMUNION?

Be honest with yourself and with God by asking questions like these:

- 1.) Am I truly sorry for my sins?
- 2.) Do I truly believe Jesus is present in this meal as the Giver and the Gift?
- 3.) Do I desire with the help of God to turn from my sinful habits?

THINGS TO THINK ABOUT

- Discuss how each of these questions can actually increase our hunger and thirst for the Lord's Supper.

10.11. WHAT IS THE MAIN THING TO REMEMBER ABOUT COMMUNION IN ALL OF THIS?

All this talk of Communion shows it is very powerful stuff! Jesus meant for it to be a powerful blessing in your life. The chief blessing above all is that Christ is coming to you to be united with you and bestowing the greatest gift of all—the forgiveness of sin! With that forgiveness, you know you have life now and life forever with God. It is a tiny foretaste of all the blessings God wants to give to you!

(Jesus said) "Drink of it, all of you, for this is My blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins." (Matthew 26:28)

Closing Prayer: Lord Jesus Christ, on the cross You sacrificed Your body and blood for our sins. Thank You for giving us that same body and blood in Communion for our forgiveness, strength and peace. Guard my heart to always receive You in a worthy manner. Amen.