

November 26
Lesson 13 (NIV)

REMEMBERING

THE COVENANT

DEVOTIONAL READING: Colossians 1:9-20

BACKGROUND SCRIPTURE: 1 Corinthians 11; Jude 3

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-34

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread, ²⁴ 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.” ²⁵ In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, “This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.” ²⁶ For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord’s death until he comes.

²⁷ So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord. ²⁸ Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. ²⁹ For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves. ³⁰ That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep. ³¹ But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. ³² Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

³³ So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. ³⁴ Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment.

And when I come I will give further directions.



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KEY VERSE

This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me.—1 Corinthians 11:25

LESSON AIMS

After participating in this lesson, each learner will be able to:

1. Identify what is to be remembered when observing the Lord’s Supper.
2. Explain Jesus’ identification of his body and blood with the bread and cup, respectively.
3. Create and implement a personal strategy for self-examination during the Lord’s Supper.

LESSON OUTLINE

Introduction

- A. Sights, Sounds, Smells
- B. Lesson Background

I. The Meal of Remembrance (1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26)

- A. The Broken Bread (vv. 23, 24)
 - B. The Shared Cup (vv. 25, 26)
- An Everlasting Connection*

II. The Implications of the Meal (1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-34)

- A. Unworthy Participation (v. 27)
- Life-Giving Blood*
- B. Self-Examination (vv. 28, 29)
- C. Judging Ourselves (vv. 30-32)
- D. Caring for Others (vv. 33, 34)

Conclusion

- A. Celebrating
- B. Prayer
- C. Thought to Remember

Introduction

A. Sights, Sounds, Smells

The tang of hot apple cider, the crunch of leaves under our feet, and the sight of a pumpkin may instantly transport us back to our childhood. The scent of pine needles and peppermints, the sounds of sleigh bells, and a cold wind on our faces communicate a season of the year to us without a word's being spoken. The sound of surf and the feeling of sand between our toes are all we need to think about summer. Earthy smells of freshly tilled gardens and the sound of bird songs bring us into springtime. We may not remember the exact same events that another might when having those senses teased, but we remember.

Memories are triggered by our senses. So that we never forget what Jesus has done, he has given us a sensory experience that helps us remember.

B. Lesson Background

The church in Corinth was started by Paul on his second missionary journey in the early AD 50s, barely 20 years after the death and resurrection of Christ. Corinth was not a center of renowned culture like Athens, but a city of hard-working folks from many backgrounds. It had a Jewish community, and it is here that Paul met Aquila and Priscilla, Jews who had come from Rome and were running a tent-making business (Acts 18:2, 3). Paul, Aquila, and Priscilla worked together in other venues (see Acts 18:18; compare Romans 16:3; 1 Corinthians 16:19; 2 Timothy 4:19).

The Corinthian church was a rambunctious and troubled group. It had problems with factionalism, immorality, rivalry, divorce, and false doctrine. Despite its troubles, though, the church in Corinth had a throbbing vibrancy and dynamism that shone through its mistakes. It had a large place in Paul's heart. He started the congregation and saw it through its birth pains, left and returned for at least one visit, and wrote two substantial letters to help it sort out problems (1 and 2 Corinthians). The trials of the Corinthians that caused Paul to write become a blessing to us, for we are able to see how the great apostle dealt with difficult issues in a godly and inspired way.

At the heart of the problems in Corinth was a disrespect that some members had for other members. This lack of concern caused a crisis in the way they practiced the Lord's Supper. Understanding the way the Corinthians met for worship will give context to today's lesson text.

First, the weekly meeting of the Corinthian church was likely on what we would call Saturday evening. In Jewish reckoning, one day ended and a new day began when the sun went down. The first day of the week, Sunday, therefore began on our Saturday night. The Corinthian church probably chose to meet in the evening because many of its members worked (some were slaves) and could not gather during the day.

Second, the Corinthians observed the Lord's Supper each week as part of their worship service. It would not be overstatement to say that this was the central part of their time together. Churches today celebrate the Lord's Supper with differing frequency and importance, but for these ancient Christians it was central and weekly. This makes Paul's comments about the Lord's Supper very important, and this centrality causes it to be a reflection of deeper spiritual and social currents within the congregation.

Third, the Corinthian Lord's Supper was in the context of a fellowship meal. They did not have the option of tiny plastic cups or individual wafers purchased from the Christian supply house in Corinth. Rather, they used bread and wine that was a normal part of meals. How this worked, exactly, we do not know, but it created problems. Apparently the meal began before everyone arrived, and sometimes there was no food left by the time they did arrive (1 Corinthians 11:17-22). This produced an awkward atmosphere of disrespect that belied the message of unity that should have been at the core of remembering Christ in community.

HOW TO SAY IT

Aquila *Ack-wih-luh*.

Corinthians *Ko-rin-thee-unz* (*th* as in *thin*).

Galatians *Guh-lay-shunz*.

Jeremiah *Jair-uh-my-uh*.

Pilate *Pie-lut*.

I. The Meal of Remembrance

(1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26)

A. The Broken Bread (vv. 23, 24)

²³ For I received from the Lord what I also passed on to you: The Lord Jesus, on the night he was betrayed, took bread,

At the Jerusalem Conference ([Acts 15](#)) Paul had contact with most of the original apostles, so any of them could have told Paul about what happened *the night Jesus was betrayed*. However, Paul notes that he received his information *from the Lord*. This agrees with what Paul tells the Galatians about having received his message by direct revelation from Jesus Christ ([Galatians 1:12](#)).

Paul frames the last supper in an unexpected way. He does not say it takes place the night before Jesus' crucifixion, but on the night he was betrayed. The memory of Judas's betrayal is strong (see [Mark 3:19](#)). That was an epic night, a night remembered for many things. It was Jesus' last night on earth before his death, and it set in motion a chain of events that changed the course of history.

Paul's recounting of the last supper begins with a simple loaf of bread. It is likely that this was unleavened Passover bread ([Luke 22:15](#)), something like the matzo bread used by Jewish people today.

24. 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."

Paul relates that Jesus gave *thanks* over the bread. The Greek word for "give thanks" is *eucharisteo*, and this is why some Christian traditions refer to the Lord's Supper as the Eucharist. It is appropriate that when we observe the Lord's Supper, we remember to give thanks to God for the sacrifice of Christ that the symbolic meal represents.

The traditional Passover meal features a time when bread is shared. We do not know how closely modern Passover observances reflect practices from the time of Jesus, but the use of unleavened bread is significant because of its connection with the original Passover meal. The exodus from Egypt was a hurried undertaking, so much so that it did not allow for the making of bread that had time to rise from its yeast ([Exodus 12:39](#)). Eating unleavened bread is a way for Jewish people to remember their hasty escape from the land of slavery. Jesus transformed this ancient symbol into a new focus of *remembrance*.

What Do You Think?

Other than In Remembrance of Me, what would be some good inscriptions for Communion tables? Why?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Inscriptions that focus on Jesus

Inscriptions that focus on the participants

Other

Jesus himself used the analogy of bread as a representation of his physical body ([John 6:51](#)). Using a loaf that can be broken for the Lord's Supper adds to our appreciation of his sacrifice. Jesus was cruelly whipped, was crowned with thorn branches, and had nails driven through his hands and feet. His body was abused. He died after hours of physical agony, and we should not forget this.

B. The Shared Cup ([vv. 25, 26](#))

25. In the same way, after supper he took the cup, saying, "This cup is the new covenant in my blood; do this, whenever you drink it, in remembrance of me."

The modern Passover service has four cups that are shared, each with an important symbolic function. Luke's account of the last supper includes two cups, one that is given thanks over ([Luke 22:17](#)) and one that Jesus uses to symbolize the new covenant ([22:20](#)). Paul teaches the Corinthians to follow the example of drinking of *the cup* that comes after the breaking of the bread.

This symbol from the last supper is designed to remind us of *blood*. Blood is associated with sacrifice in the Old Testament ([Leviticus 9:18](#)). Blood removed from the animal is a sign of death and is associated with making a testament, a binding agreement between two parties. The covenant between God and the Israelites was sealed with a bloody ceremony. The blood used in this was called "the blood of the covenant" ([Exodus 24:8](#)).

Jesus' words show his intention to move beyond this earlier agreement at Sinai and inaugurate a new, superior agreement. This is the new covenant prophesied in [Jeremiah 31:31](#). A new relationship is to be established where laws are a matter of the heart ([31:33](#)) and where sins are forgiven forever ([31:34](#)). Paul teaches that the shedding of Christ's blood is "a sacrifice of atonement" ([Romans 3:25](#)), an acceptable substitute to God for the punishment for sins that we deserve. When we drink the cup of the Lord's Supper, we should remember that Christ's death makes our forgiveness possible. We are not simply remembering our Savior and his death. We are remembering that we are forgiven people, saved by his blood. This is the essence of *the new covenant*.

AN EVERLASTING CONNECTION

A traveling replica of the Hebrew tabernacle came to a nearby city. Thinking it would help my children understand the Bible stories they know, I took them to tour the tabernacle.

We donned headphones and listened to a narrator describe the parts of the tabernacle as we walked to the different stations. We saw the altar and threw wood chips on the fire, representing the sacrifice of our lives to God. We lit a lamp to symbolize the light of God in our lives and carried burning sticks of incense representing our prayers.

My youngest daughter and I toured the tabernacle together. I watched her dip matzo bread into the cup and eat it, hearing how the bread that the Hebrews ate symbolized the future sacrifice of Jesus on the cross. Later that night, my little girl told me how she felt close to God when she was in the tabernacle and how listening to the description of the symbols made her feel like she was there in the desert with the Hebrews.

When the Israelites ate the Passover, they remembered their deliverance from Egypt ([Deuteronomy 16:2, 3](#)). When we take Communion, we remember our deliverance from sin.

—L. M. W.

26. For whenever you eat this bread and drink this cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.

We are accustomed to remembering this sacrificial *death* of Christ when we *eat and drink* the elements of the Lord's Supper, but Paul adds something more. The meal of remembrance indicates a waiting period. It is necessary until Christ comes again. As we wait, the celebration of the Lord's Supper is a way of showing the central truth of the gospel, which is Jesus' sacrificial death.

The elements of the Lord's Supper speak through actions in powerful and beautiful ways. Rather than just hear words, when we take of the loaf and cup we see, touch, smell, and taste. We share in a way that is visible to all onlookers. The celebration is intended to be done in community, therefore serving as a witness to the

unity of the church. Paul knows this is important for the Corinthians. But they seem more focused on divisions than harmony.

What Do You Think?

What can churches do to enhance the sensory impact of the Lord's Supper?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding the sense of sight
- Regarding the sense of sound
- Regarding the sense of hearing
- Regarding the sense of taste
- Regarding the sense of touch

II. The Implications of the Meal

(1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-34)

A. Unworthy Participation (v. 27)

27. So then, whoever eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty of sinning against the body and blood of the Lord.

Having rehearsed the origin of the Lord's Supper and explained its meaning, Paul now gives some implications for the participants and the church that hosts it. These serve as warnings for the Corinthians. They have badly distorted the practice (1 Corinthians 11:17-22), and these distortions have serious consequences.

First, Paul warns that those who participate in observing the Lord's Supper must do so in a worthy manner. To participate unworthily is to become guilty of the same type of disrespect for Jesus that fueled the angry mob at his crucifixion. Jesus' self-sacrifice was met with abuse and ridicule. Pilate allowed his death, knowing he was innocent (Luke 23:4; John 19:4). Herod and the soldiers mocked Jesus by dressing him in a royal robe and jamming a crown of thorns on his head (Luke 23:11; John 19:2). The chief priests and the crowd countered Pilate's verdict of innocence with demands to kill Jesus (Luke 23:13-21). The way the Corinthians are observing the Lord's Supper is a mockery in the spirit of those who conspired to kill Jesus. Such unworthy participants leave the meal of remembrance with symbolic blood on their hands.

LIFE-GIVING BLOOD

My daughter's fourth-grade teacher uses pet lizards to teach the students about caring for living creatures. Each table in the classroom has its own lizard; my daughter's table has two. One Monday morning, my little girl went into the classroom and headed straight for the lizard cage to check on them after the weekend. She leaned down to inspect him and saw blood smeared on the clear plastic side of the cage! Horrified, she alerted the teacher, who determined that the lizards had been fighting and one was injured.

My daughter was upset. The presence of the blood made the situation even more dangerous than just two arguing lizards. Blood meant a real battle had taken place, and someone had lost! Happily, both lizards survived the ordeal; but whenever I tell that story, someone gasps in horror. The thought of a little girl finding blood, a fight so violent that it drew that blood . . . it all seems more appalling than we are used to hearing about in a fourth-grader's classroom.

The Bible repeatedly uses blood as a symbol of life. Without blood, there is no life, so anything to do with blood evokes a strong reaction in us. And for Christians, blood is a reminder of the importance of the sacrifice of Jesus. The human situation was so dire that it required a sacrifice of blood to redeem it. But there is just one sacrifice, just one battle for our salvation—"through the sacrifice of the body of Jesus Christ once for all" (Hebrews 10:10).

—L. M. W.

What Do You Think?

What steps can we take to avoid observing the Lord's Supper in an unworthy way?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- Regarding motives
- Regarding means (time, place, etc.)
- Regarding spiritual preparation

B. Self-Examination (vv. 28, 29)

28, 29. Everyone ought to examine themselves before they eat of the bread and drink from the cup. For those who eat and drink without discerning the body of Christ eat and drink judgment on themselves.

How do we properly heed Paul's dire warning? The key is one of self-examination before the time of observing the Lord's Supper arrives. Are we coming with an attitude of humility and thankfulness? Have we looked into our hearts to root out hidden and persistent sin that damages our relationships with the Lord and others?

Failure in self-examination results in failure to discern *the body of Christ*. These words anticipate 1 Corinthians 12:12, where Paul uses the metaphor of a human body to represent the church, Christ's body. This calls the Corinthians to pay attention to the others who are observing in the Lord's Supper with them—their fellow church members. The self-examination Paul demands involves correcting attitudes toward others. The Lord's Supper should remind us of reconciliation. We are all sinners in need of a Savior. We are all forgiven as a result of the same sacrificial death of our Lord. There are no privileged diners at the Lord's table.

What Do You Think?

What are some ways to become more discerning, as that word is used in this context?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

Prior to corporate worship
During corporate worship

C. Judging Ourselves (vv. 30-32)

30. That is why many among you are weak and sick, and a number of you have fallen asleep.

Paul is not speaking here of some magical properties of the elements of the Lord's Supper, as if improper attitudes cause them to bring death. Paul is saying that the atmosphere of hostility that has overtaken the Corinthians is causing spiritual numbness. Even more, the stress of this spiritual sickness may be causing physical illness, even premature death. This speaks to the deep dysfunction of this congregation, whose members are even bringing lawsuits against one another (1 Corinthians 6:7). This must be corrected at the hostile heart. Therefore self-examination must be brutally honest.

31, 32. But if we were more discerning with regard to ourselves, we would not come under such judgment. Nevertheless, when we are judged in this way by the Lord, we are being disciplined so that we will not be finally condemned with the world.

If we all practice sincere self-judgment, focusing on our own areas that need correction, we are less likely to judge others. Paul says that if such self-judgment leads to self-correction, we avoid the need for Christ to chasten us. Furthermore, such self-judgment will protect us from the eventual judgment of condemnation that Christ will make on the unbelieving world. The time of the Lord's Supper is an ideal opportunity for self-examination and self-judgment in light of the sacrifice of Christ.

What Do You Think?

What self-correction procedures do you find especially noteworthy?

Talking Points for Your Discussion

- In a spiritual sense
- In a physical sense
- In a mental sense

D. Caring for Others (vv. 33, 34)

33, 34. So then, my brothers and sisters, when you gather to eat, you should all eat together. Anyone who is hungry should eat something at home, so that when you meet together it may not result in judgment. And when I come I will give further directions.

Paul finishes the section with two simple directives to help solve the Corinthians' problems with the Lord's Supper. First, they should wait until everyone arrives before beginning. This is a matter of mutual respect and concern. Some Corinthians who work on Saturday are not free to come until their work is done. Being impatient with them for that is not a sign of respect.

Second, the expectations of a meal are causing problems, so Paul advises that everyone *eat something at home*. We do not know how many people are involved in the Corinthian church, perhaps a couple hundred. For such a group, the logistics of staging a weekly meal are outweighing the benefits. They need to focus on the essentials of the Lord's Supper in order to be able to relish its meaning and power. To be distracted from this risks *judgment*, a result no one wants.

There seem to be other issues to resolve concerning the Lord's Supper, given Paul's concluding statement that *when I come I will give further directions*. But Paul's two directives are the most important correctives for the time being.

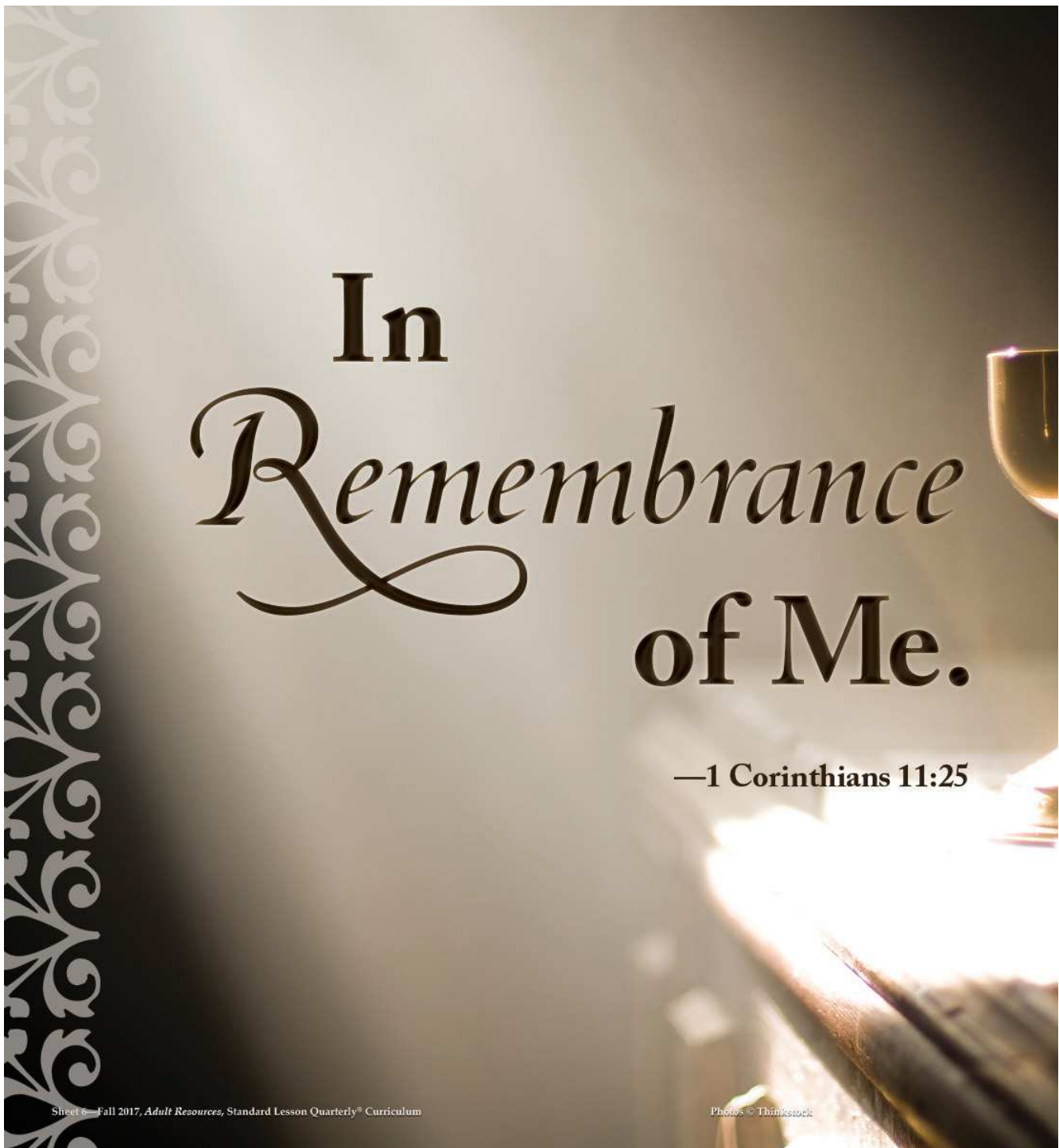
The way the Lord's Supper is observed in congregations today varies widely. But the principles behind Paul's directives to the Corinthians are still authoritative: remember what the loaf and cup signify, and respect your fellow participants.

Conclusion

A. Celebrating

I had the honor of sharing the Lord's Supper with an African village congregation a few years ago. This was a very poor community. The church building was a thatched-roof hut with a dirt floor. There were no modern facilities, padded chairs, or technical enhancements as I was accustomed to at home. The worship service was much longer, with energetic singing, multiple sermons, and performances by joyous children's choirs.

At the end, we celebrated the Lord's Supper. It was a little different, with an assortment of glasses and a freshly baked loaf of bread. We took turns coming in an unhurried manner to the little table where the elements sat. The number of glasses for the red juice was insufficient, so these were refilled as the service proceeded. People came to the table in groups, often holding hands and offering expressions of praise and prayer. It took about 30 minutes, much longer than the efficient five-minute celebrations at my church back home!



Visual for Lesson 13. *When you arrive at [1 Corinthians 11:24](#), pose the discussion question associated with it as you point to this visual.*

Yet I felt I was at home. The culture shock for me of being in an African village was great, but the comfort of meeting with fellow believers around the Lord's table outweighed this. Jesus' presence was there too, and I could not help but remember him and the sacrifice he made for me and for my fellow believers. The Lord's Supper is a time to remember our new covenant with God, founded on the fact that Christ's death makes forgiveness possible. It is also a time to remember that he did not die for me alone, but for all who come to him as the New Testament directs. I still see their faces when I come to the table.

B. Prayer

Father, before celebrating the Lord's Supper, may we examine our hearts to clear them of unworthy distractions and disrespect for those with us as we remember the new life we have because of Christ's death. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

C. Thought to Remember

The Lord's Supper connects us with God

and fellow believers.

INVOLVEMENT LEARNING

Enhance your lesson with NIV® Bible Student (from your curriculum supplier) and the reproducible activity page (at www.standardlesson.com or in the back of the NIV® Standard Lesson Commentary Deluxe Edition).

Into the Lesson

Before class place the following items in separate sandwich bags: half a lemon; cut onions; paper towel dampened with vinegar; paper towel dampened with ammonia; and paper towel dampened with perfume (or other strong scents of your choice). To begin class, pass the bags around, asking students to sample their aromas. As they do, have them think of any memories a particular scent triggers for them.

Then ask for specific responses. For example, the ammonia might bring back memories of doing household chores as a child. The onions might trigger memories of cookouts. Perfume might bring a specific person to mind.

Say, “Researchers have found that smell is very powerful for triggering memories. Other senses are all memory aids also, especially when combined.”

Alternative. Download and distribute copies of the “Getting the Sense of It” reproducible page. Have students work on it in small groups.

After either activity, lead into Bible study by saying, “We are so forgetful sometimes! But our memories are often triggered by our senses—a certain scent, taste, sound, touch, or visual cue. We are never to forget what Jesus has done, so we are given a way to remember him regularly.”

Into the Word

Divide the class into three groups. Each group should act as mentors to a new believer. Using the assigned texts below, each group will answer its person’s questions about the Lord’s Supper.

Group 1—1 Corinthians 11:23-26

“I’m really new to church, so taking Communion is unfamiliar to me. Why do you do it? How can I be sure I’m doing it the right way?”

Group 2—1 Corinthians 11:27-30

“Last Sunday I heard a verse about not taking Communion in a way that brings condemnation. What does that mean? How can I make sure I don’t do that?”

Group 3—1 Corinthians 11:28, 31-34

“I’m not sure what I’m supposed to be thinking about during the Communion service. I get distracted by the people around me and how they’re acting. What do you focus on during that time?”

Encourage groups to prepare a person to ask the question and another to present the group’s answers. Possible responses are as follows:

Group 1—*Jesus wants us to remember his death on the cross for us, so he gave us the bread to remind us of his body that was beaten, abused, and pierced. The fruit of the vine reminds us of the blood that flowed from his wounds. Because he took the punishment we deserved, we have been saved by his death and cleansed of our sins. The Lord’s Supper is a time to focus your thoughts on Jesus and all he has done for you.*

Group 2—*One way we can be unworthy is if we come to the table with bitterness or ill feeling toward other Christians. That’s why we are told to make sure our hearts are right with God. If you are focusing on Jesus and his death on the cross and confess any sinful attitudes toward others, then you will please God.*

Group 3—*I focus on the bread and cup in order to meditate on how much I love Jesus because of his death on the cross for me. I try not to notice other people and what they are doing, as it’s more important that I focus on myself and whether or not I am living up to God’s expectations.*

Into Life

Set some time aside to plan a special Communion service just for your class. Talk about a time and place for this special remembrance.

Alternative. Distribute copies of the “Getting the Gist of It” activity from the reproducible page. Read through the themes and ask students to share other ways they meditate during Communion time.