

Communion Scriptures: Bible Verses for the Lord's Supper

The essential communion scriptures — 1 Corinthians 11, the Last Supper accounts in the Gospels, and covenant passages — with pastoral notes on when to read each one.

The Words of Institution

1 CORINTHIANS 11:23-26 (ESV)

“For I received from the Lord what I also delivered to you, that 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.”

The single most commonly read communion passage. Works as the entire reading on its own, or as the anchor paired with a Gospel account.

LUKE 22:19-20 (ESV)

“And he 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's account carries the tenderness of the upper room — good for a Maundy Thursday or a communion service focused on Christ's self-giving.

MATTHEW 26:26-28 (ESV)

“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's phrasing — 'poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins' — foregrounds atonement. Pair with a service centered on the cross.

MARK 14:22-24 (ESV)

“And as they were eating, he took bread, and after blessing it broke it and gave it to them, and said, ‘Take; this is my body.’ And he took a cup, and when he had given thanks he gave it to them, and they all drank of it. And he said to them, ‘This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many.’”

Mark's compressed account — good when the sermon is long and the reading needs to be short.

Approaching the Table Rightly

1 CORINTHIANS 11:27-29 (ESV)

“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.”

The self-examination passage. Read carefully — its point is discernment, not exclusion. Frame with grace so it doesn't produce fear.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:16-17 (ESV)

“The cup of blessing that we bless, is it not a participation in the blood of Christ? The bread that we break, is it not a participation in the body of Christ? Because there is one bread, we who are many are one body, for we all partake of the one bread.”

The unity passage — the table is not private devotion but common life. Good for services that emphasize the body of Christ together.

Covenant Background

JEREMIAH 31:31-34 (ESV)

“Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with their fathers on the day when I took them by the hand to bring them out of the land of Egypt... For I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin no more.”

The new-covenant prophecy Jesus explicitly invoked at the Last Supper. Pairs powerfully with 1 Corinthians 11.

EXODUS 24:8 (ESV)

“And Moses took the blood and threw it on the people and said, ‘Behold the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words.’”

The phrase Jesus quotes when he says 'this is my blood of the covenant.' Reading this first makes his words in the upper room land with their full Old Testament weight.

ISAIAH 53:5 (ESV)

“But he was pierced for our transgressions; he was crushed for our iniquities; upon him was the chastisement that brought us peace, and with his wounds we are healed.”

The suffering-servant passage that stands behind 'this is my body, given for you.'

Communion and Hope

1 CORINTHIANS 11:26 (ESV)

“For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.”

The forward-looking verse — the meal is not only memory but anticipation. Good closing verse before distribution.

REVELATION 19:9 (ESV)

“Blessed are those who are invited to the marriage supper of the Lamb.”

Ties the present meal to the future feast. A single-line reading right before the elements are served.

LUKE 22:15-16 (ESV)

“And he said to them, 'I have earnestly desired to eat this Passover with you before I suffer. For I tell you I will not eat it until it is fulfilled in the kingdom of God.'”

The eschatological framing. Christ's own longing for the meal — and for the greater meal it points toward.

How to Use These in a Service

Placement. The words of institution (typically 1 Corinthians 11:23–26) belong right before the elements are distributed, not earlier in the service. Reading them at the moment of distribution roots the physical act in Christ's own words rather than in your framing of them.

Pairing. A common pattern is one anchor text plus one shorter paired reading: the anchor is almost always 1 Corinthians 11, and the paired reading rotates — Old Testament covenant background one month, a Gospel account the next, a hope-oriented text the next. This keeps the meaning three-dimensional without abandoning the central passage.

The self-examination text. 1 Corinthians 11:27–29 is often read but frequently misapplied. Paul's concern was rich Corinthians humiliating poor ones at the meal — the 'unworthy manner' is that specific social sin, not general unworthiness. Frame the reading so it produces honest self-examination without producing fear that keeps grieving or struggling believers from the table.

Tone. Communion is both serious and joyful. Scriptures that carry only the weight of the cross without the promise of return, or only the celebration of union without the discernment of the body, distort the meal. The four categories above — institution, approach, covenant, hope — held in balance produce a service that feels neither morbid nor sentimental.

Frequently Asked

What scripture is traditionally read at communion?

1 Corinthians 11:23–26 is the most commonly read passage — it contains the words of institution given to Paul directly from the Lord. Many pastors pair it with one of the Gospel accounts of the Last Supper (Matthew 26, Mark 14, Luke 22) or with Jesus' bread-of-life discourse in John 6.

What does the Bible say about taking communion?

1 Corinthians 11:27–29 is the central passage on how to approach the table: examine yourself, discern the body, and eat and drink without treating it as ordinary food. The tone is serious but not fearful — the same passage roots the meal in Christ's love and covenant.

Do I have to read a scripture before communion?

No fixed liturgical requirement in most traditions, but reading a scripture roots the practice in Christ's own words rather than in a repeated ritual disconnected from its source. Even a single verse from 1 Corinthians 11 or Luke 22 does that work.

What is a good short scripture for communion?

1 Corinthians 11:26 — 'For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes.' It captures institution, remembrance, and hope in one sentence.

Can I use Old Testament passages for communion?

Yes — Exodus 12 (Passover), Exodus 24:8 (blood of the covenant), and Jeremiah 31:31–34 (new covenant) all illuminate what Jesus was doing at the Last Supper. They work best as background readings paired with a New Testament institution text.

How often should communion scriptures change?

Rotating between 1 Corinthians 11, the four Gospel accounts, and a covenant background text over the course of a year keeps the meaning fresh without abandoning the anchor passage. Many pastors keep 1 Corinthians 11 as the constant and rotate the paired reading.

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