

Week 5: Jesus, Our Bridegroom

This week we will focus on covenant love for Jesus and others as the bride of Christ.

Supplies:

- Optional Opening Activity – Salty snack and unsalted version (pretzels, chips, nuts, etc.)
- Communion elements – Saltines or other salty cracker and grape juice (Note: If you come from a tradition that says only pastors can administer the elements, please note that we are teaching about the elements as they aligned to the Passover which was celebrated as a family. This is a family meal for the family of God and was celebrated in the early church in homes.)
- Tissues, music player, and Family Lesson handout (on last page) for any parents in your group

Optional Opening Activity as People Arrive: Set out salted and unsalted snacks to enjoy. Ask: Which version tastes better? Salt was added to all the sacrifices in the old covenant. Salt is a symbol of God's everlasting covenant because it is a preservative and never loses its flavor. When Jesus says in Matthew 5:13 that God's people are the salt of the earth, he is saying we carry the flavor of God's love, preserve his holiness on earth, and we will live forever in covenant with him. When Jesus mentions salt losing its saltiness, he's talking about something that is impossible. For salt to lose its saltiness, it would cease to be salt. The only way to lose our saltiness is to walk away from covenant with God.

Prayer: Invite the Spirit to come and lead us into a deeper revelation of Jesus' covenant faithfulness.

Activity: Hand out the communion elements to each person. Read: During the Passover celebration, the Jews celebrated God's deliverance from bondage with a special meal. The meal included unleavened bread because they had to leave Egypt so quickly there was no time for the bread to rise. By the time of Jesus, there were four cups added to the meal symbolizing their sanctification, deliverance, redemption, and a cup of praise. The second and third cups are mentioned in Luke's account of the last supper.

Remaining in the Word: Encourage people to have their Bible open as you read.

1. **Read Luke 22:15-20.** *"Jesus said, 'I have been very eager to eat this Passover meal with you before my suffering begins. ¹⁶ For I tell you now that I won't eat this meal again until its meaning is fulfilled in the Kingdom of God.' ¹⁷ Then he took a cup of wine and gave thanks to God for it. Then he said, 'Take this and share it among yourselves. ¹⁸ For I will not drink wine again until the Kingdom of God has come.' ¹⁹ He took some bread and gave thanks to God for it. Then he broke it in pieces and gave it to the disciples, saying, 'This is my body, which is given for you. Do this in remembrance of me.' ²⁰ After supper he took another cup of wine and said, 'This cup is the new covenant between God and his people—an agreement confirmed with my blood, which is poured out as a sacrifice for you.'"*

Explanation of the Bread: The bread Jesus broke was called the "afikomen." Earlier in the meal, three loaves of flatbread in a linen container were blessed as "echad," a unified one, just as God the Father, Son, and Spirit are one. The center loaf of flatbread was broken in half, folded in a linen cloth, and hidden to be retrieved later. It was this piece of bread Jesus offered as his body that would be broken, wrapped in linen to be buried, then brought out again to be given to us as our Savior. By taking his body into our body, we become "echad," a unified one with Jesus.

Explanation of the Cup: The cup Jesus offered his disciples after the meal is the cup of redemption, remembering God's promise in Exodus 6:6, *"I will redeem you with an outstretched arm"* (NIV). It is

this cup that Jesus says now represents his blood as our Redeemer who redeemed us with an outstretched arm on the cross. The cup of redemption is also the cup of the new covenant which points to our everlasting relationship with God that is sealed in blood. The fourth cup, the cup of praise, points to our new relationship with Jesus as our Bridegroom, for it recalls God's promise in Exodus 6:7, *"I will take you as my own people"* (NIV).

Communion as a Bride. Read: As you eat the bread, reflect on the meaning of taking Jesus' body into your body as he takes you into his body, becoming one with the Lord just like a husband and wife become one flesh. (Eat the bread.) As you drink the cup, think about it as agreeing to be in an everlasting covenant with God. (Drink the cup.)

Discuss: What does the word "communion" mean and why do we call the bread and cup communion with Christ? How does this covenant meal lead us to intimacy with Christ as his bride? How did it impact you when you took communion in the bridal identity?

2. **Read John 17:20-26, Jesus' prayer for his bride after he gave us his covenant proposal during the Passover meal.** *"I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. ²¹ I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. ²² I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. ²³ I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me"* (John 17:20-23).

Discuss: According to Jesus' prayer, what does God want our union with him to look like as his bride, the church? How can the church live in perfect unity? (Hint: See verse 21.)

3. **Hear the heart of God regarding our faithfulness in covenant with one another as you read Malachi 2:14-16.** *"You cry out, 'Why doesn't the Lord accept my worship?' I'll tell you why! Because the Lord witnessed the vows you and your wife made when you were young. But you have been unfaithful to her, though she remained your faithful partner, the wife of your marriage vows. ¹⁵ Didn't the Lord make you one with your wife? In body and spirit you are his. And what does he want? Godly children from your union. So guard your heart; remain loyal to the wife of your youth. ¹⁶ 'For I hate divorce!' says the Lord, the God of Israel. 'To divorce your wife is to overwhelm her with cruelty,' says the Lord of Heaven's Armies. 'So guard your heart; do not be unfaithful to your wife.'"*

Discuss: We learned during the redeemer lesson that we are to pray for redemption and help one another rebuild ruins as the body of Christ, so we want to lift up broken marriages and encourage one another to love their spouse as Christ has loved us. According to the passage in Malachi, why does faithfulness in our marriage covenant matter so much to God? How is God's view of divorce an expression of his love? How does the Holy Spirit help us to remain faithful in our covenant with Jesus and each other?

Worship: Play the song, "Lord, I Give You My Heart," by Benjamin William Hastings. (A link can be found on the worship playlist at the bottom of the Puzzle Piece 5 page at TillingMinistries.com.) As you worship, picture yourself offering your heart to Jesus as an empty vessel to that he fills with his love. Picture Jesus walking through your daily life with you, pouring out the love he's put in you.

Closing Prayer: In groups of 3, share prayer requests and pray for each other to remain faithful in covenant with Christ, in marriage, and in unity with the bride of Christ.

Optional Handout for Families: Print off copies of the next page to hand out to parents in your group who would like to teach their children about Jesus' covenant love.

Jesus, Our Bridegroom, Family Lesson

Learn how God joins us to himself and our spouse in covenant.

Bible Verse: Ephesians 5:31-32: *“As the Scriptures say, ‘A man leaves his father and mother and is joined to his wife, and the two are united into one’³² This is a great mystery, but it is an illustration of the way Christ and the church are one.”*

Supplies: Muffin pan, mixing bowl, oil spray, optional kitchen gloves, 1 egg, 1 lb. ground beef, ½ lb. other ground meat (ground turkey, pork, sausage, lamb), 1/8 tsp. salt, ¼ c. plain breadcrumbs, ½ c. pizza sauce (plus more for topping), ½ tsp. Italian seasoning, 6 oz. (1½ c.) shredded mozzarella

Activity: Making Pizza Meatball Cups. (Gather supplies before beginning. Read notes aloud as you go.)

1. **Preheat oven to 375 degrees and grease a muffin pan with cooking oil spray.**
2. **Hold up the egg.** The Bible describes God the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit as “echad” or a unified one, just like this egg has three parts but is one. Let’s see if you can identify all three parts as we crack the egg into the bowl. (Point out yolk, egg white, and shell.) **Beat the egg with a fork.**
3. **Add the ground beef and other ½ lb. meat to the bowl.** Just like we’re about to combine these two kinds of meat together to form meatballs, when two people get married, the Bible says they are united into one by God, who is represented by the egg. God binds us to our spouse like egg binds foods together.
4. **Add 1/8 tsp. salt.** Salt was added to every sacrifice in God’s covenant with Israel because salt gives flavor and preserves food by making it last. In the Bible, salt is symbolic of covenant, a word that describes a lifelong agreement between two people, like marriage. God’s covenant with us through Jesus lasts forever, just like salt lasts forever.
5. **Add ¼ c. breadcrumbs.** The Bible calls Jesus the bread of life. When we receive Jesus as our Savior, God makes an eternal covenant with us, promising to love us and keep us with him forever.
6. **Add the ½ c. pizza sauce and ½ tsp. Italian seasoning.** Do you remember what the pizza sauce represented when we made our God pizza? (The Holy Spirit.) The Holy Spirit helps us remember to love each other the way Jesus loves us. He fills us with God’s presence and goodness.
7. **Mix all the ingredients together with your hands** (with gloves, if you prefer). Can you separate the two kinds of meat anymore? The Bible says that when a man and a woman get married, they become “one flesh” just like the two kinds of meat combined to make a new mixture. Jesus said, *“What God has joined together, let no one separate”* (Mark 10:9, NIV). God wants covenant to last.
8. **Divide meat mixture into four quarters in the bowl, then form three meatballs from each quarter until you have 12 meatballs. Place each meatball in the prepared pan and press up the sides to form a cup.** Just like we had to work to form the meatballs, staying in relationship with others requires effort. What are some things we do to stay connected to Jesus? (Read the Bible, pray, etc.) How do we have good relationships with people? (Forgive, do nice things, listen, share, etc.)
9. **Sprinkle mozzarella into each meatball cup.** Do you remember what the cheese represented when we made our God pizza? (God’s love.) Just like we poured the pizza sauce and cheese into our cups, the Bible says that *“God’s love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us”* (Romans 5:5, NIV). Jesus helps us remain in covenant by teaching us how to love each other and by giving us his Spirit to fill our hearts with God’s love.
10. **Bake meatballs for 15-18 minutes.** Serve with additional pizza sauce poured over the top and enjoy!