



Is My Child Ready for Communion?

By Karen Moderow

It began as soon as my 5-year-old spied the white cloth draped over the communion table.

“Mommy, is there communion today?” he asked with an edge of excitement in his voice. “Yes, Michael.” I knew his next question before he asked. “Can I have some?”

Here we go again, I thought. “Honey, I just don’t think you’re ready yet.” “You always say that,” he persisted. “When will I be ready?” “I don’t know,” I said lamely. “We’ll talk about it when we get home.” But we had talked about it before – every time communion was served.

It certainly would have been easier to let him take communion. Like most parents who have small children with them, I seldom found communion a contemplative experience. To buy some peace, I was tempted to let him take it. Yet I didn’t feel right about doing that.

I didn’t want to dismiss the commitment my son had made when he asked Jesus into his heart. Yet did he understand communion’s significance? Did his desire reflect a growing faith or just a child’s love for novelty? As my husband, Joe, and I worked through this issue, we asked several questions:

1. *Has our child reached the age of accountability?*

Michael clearly knew right from wrong. One morning as I was getting ready for a Bible study, he and his 2-year-old brother, David, played nearby with their trucks. I left for a moment and came back to find cleanser sprinkled generously across the hardwood floor.

“Who did this?” I demanded. Michael stood perfectly still except for his hands, which he wrung like a limp dishrag. I could see his mind working. Should he blame his brother? David was too young to object. Michael knew what a lie was. I wondered what he would do. “Michael?” I asked. “I did it, Mommy,” he finally said. The sadness in his voice left no doubt. He knew he had done wrong, but he was willing to own up to it.

Based on the warning in 1 Corinthians 11:27-30 to those who fail to respect the Lord’s Supper, Joe and I concluded we could not allow our boys to participate before they could understand right and wrong.

2. *Has our child demonstrated a sincere faith?*

As we nourished the choice that Michael made to receive Christ, we looked for budding fruit that would give evidence of his faith. Was he kind to his friends? If he lashed out at someone in anger, was he willing to ask God and the one he had hurt for forgiveness? Was he quick to make things, right?

At first, we saw resistance in these areas, indicating Michael did not yet see the connection between the Cross and his everyday life. Our concern was that allowing him to partake too soon would hinder his making that connection.

But the cleanser caper showed me Michael was beginning to understand sin and the importance of right choices. (I also discovered he understood the need for restitution. By the time I ran back with the broom and dustpan, he had soaked the floor with water and was busy cleaning up the mess with a towel! My floor was never the same.)

3. *Is our child mature enough to take communion?*

This was a critical issue as we evaluated whether Michael was ready. Was he able to approach the Lord's Table seriously?

While Michael did understand the difference between right and wrong, and his faith in God seemed sincere, his behavior during communion concerned us.

He had difficulty in sitting still during the service. He seemed more interested in drawing or playing than focusing on the Lord's Table. (His desire to participate seemed to pass once he was certain there was no chance of a snack.) Though this was understandable, it told us Michael needed more maturity before he could appreciate communion.

4. *Has our child received proper instruction to prepare him for communion?*

Some of Michael's friends in another church had begun a yearlong preparation for their first communion. By now, Michael was 7. Though we had covered the basics at home, Joe and I felt he needed at least a pastoral conference.

After a private, one-on-one appointment, Michael came bounding out of our pastor's office. "Pastor says I'm ready!" he shouted. The next Sunday, Michael took communion with his father and me, while his little brother looked on. David's time would come later when he, like Michael, could come to the Lord's Table with greater understanding.

We felt we were on the right track but wondered if we could do more to communicate the significance of the Lord's Supper. Two years later, by the time David was ready, we found a practical way to do this.

Several days before David's first communion, we began as a family to read the story of Moses from Exodus. All week I told the boys I would be preparing a special dinner on Friday in honor of David's first communion. We ended our reading in Exodus on Friday, with the account of the Passover.

"We're having lamb for dinner tonight, David," I began. "The people of Israel had lamb for their Passover feast, too. Do you remember why?" He brightened with an "I know!" look. "They had to kill a lamb and put the blood on the top of the door!" "Why did they do that?" "So, the angel of death wouldn't kill their firstborn son . . ." He retold the story in detail.

I asked more questions to help him draw the connection between the Old Testament lamb and Jesus, the Lamb who was sacrificed for our sins.

"The Jewish people have the Passover feast every year to celebrate the great thing God did by saving their lives," I concluded. "Communion is our feast when we celebrate what God has done through the sacrifice of the perfect Lamb, Jesus."

That Sunday, David took his first communion with a clear understanding that Jesus' blood had been poured out to save him, just as the lamb's blood had been spilled to save the lives of Israel's sons. Re-enacting the Passover feast gave David a tangible illustration of salvation and atonement that his young mind could comprehend.

5. *Will our child remember his first communion as an important step in his journey of faith?*

Through the experience of Nicholas, a 10-year-old in our church, I saw how this can be a high point in a child's life.

Nicholas' parents had told him that if he wanted to take communion, he had to get the ball rolling. So, one Sunday morning, the moment the benediction was said, he darted to be the first to greet the pastor. "I've got to talk to you this week!" Smiling, Pastor Taylor lowered his 6-foot-3-inch frame to look Nicholas in the eye. "I'm sure that could be arranged, but can you tell me what it's about?" "Yeah, I want to take communion, and my mother said I have to see you first!"

They set up an appointment. Pastor Taylor explained the need for accepting Christ's death as payment for his sins. Nicholas had been raised in the church, so Pastor Taylor covered the basics quickly. To his surprise, in their closing prayer, Nicholas led himself into a new relationship with the Lord.

Although Nick had repeatedly heard the message of salvation, his personal need for it did not click until that afternoon. While preparing for communion, Nicholas was born into God's kingdom.

At the next communion service, a group gathered around the Lord's Table. Before serving the elements, Pastor Taylor called Nicholas forward. The congregation watched expectantly.

Nicholas marched up front, looking all-boy in jeans and a navy sweater, his blonde hair neatly parted. He stood between two towering men: Pastor Taylor and an elder who was an ex-basketball player. These men stood as friends and models for him as he took part in a century-old observance.

Pastor Taylor embraced Nicholas with one strong arm. "This young man is a future leader of this church," he began. Surprise and excitement brightened Nick's face as he absorbed these words. Later, the congregation joined Nicholas in celebrating the symbol of our union with God who is living and at work among us.

Jesus said, "Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them" (Matt. 19:14). It must please the Lord when children come to His table. As parents, we have few experiences that can top the joy of leading our own child into the remembrance and worship of the living Christ.