

“**Worship sharing**” is patterned after the Quaker practice of open worship. Like open worship, worship sharing is a time for listening. There are some differences, however. In open worship, Friends tend to speak only if they feel compelled. In the context of worship sharing, you are *encouraged* to speak. Self-disclosure is an integral part of the process. Even if your thoughts seem unrefined, consider sharing them. Sometimes, catching a glimpse of someone “in process” can be more helpful than viewing their finished project. Here are some other guidelines for worship sharing:

Listen to learn. Keep in mind that each person will speak from his or her own perspective. People will feel safest if they can speak from the heart without receiving any advice or correction. If your experience has led you to a different conclusion, there is no need to be anxious. Perhaps there is a larger truth behind the seeming contradictions. In any case, try to learn from what others have said.

Listen with patience. Allow a suitable interval of silence between each speaker. This pause will give everyone an opportunity to reflect on what has been said. In the silence, see if God will bring insight. In general, do not speak a second time until each person has had the opportunity to speak. No one person should speak at great length.

Speak from your experience. In a debate, speakers often quote outside authorities to “prove” their point. It is also common for people to generalize by saying, “we” or “they,” “everybody,” “always,” “never.” In worship sharing, it is more helpful to speak only for yourself and from your own experience. Try to describe the process behind your conclusions.

Some groups may have a hard time holding to the discipline of worship sharing. If your group just wants to talk informally about these things, that’s okay – just be clear (so people don’t enter the discussion with mixed expectations).

Come to the Table



Discussion Guide

West Hills Friends
Fall 2007

COME TO THE TABLE

For almost twenty years, we've had a monthly potluck at West Hills Friends. On the last Sunday of each month, we pull all the tables out of storage. These days, it's a relatively easy process. Twenty years ago, our tables were made from thick slabs of plywood. Each one weighed slightly more than a Volkswagen bus. They pierced the unwary with splinters. Even so, we found joy in gathering at a common table.

During those early years, Derek wrote, "Come to the Table."

*God is the bread, God is the feast
Come to the table, even the least
Shall be filled
To overflowing
Overflowing with joy.*

(© West Hills Friends, 1993)

Derek's song gave expression to the longing of our hearts. We wanted West Hills Friends to be a place where everyone could feel welcomed and nourished.

We aren't the first people to associate a sense of God's presence with the intimacy of gathering at a table. After the Israelites left Egypt, they built a beautiful tent to serve as dwelling place for God's presence among them. Near the very center of the tent, the Israelites kept a table of gold and acacia wood. Twelve loaves of bread were placed upon the table (one for each tribe). The tabernacle provided the Israelites a constant place at God's table.

Jesus served dinner to his friends on the eve of his death. As he broke the bread and poured the wine, Jesus asked his followers to remember him. Later, some travelers on the road to Emmaus came to recognize that Jesus was with them when he broke bread for them. What is the connection between sharing a table and encountering the Spirit of God?

This discussion guide invites you to explore the imagery of the table in the context of your own spiritual journey. What does it mean to have a place at God's table?

For this discussion, please reflect on your experience of being at the table. What makes a shared meal especially memorable for you? To what extent do you experience these same qualities as a vital part of your relationship to God?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider what you have learned about "coming to the table." After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on sitting down with others at a common table, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. After everyone has spoken briefly, describe one of your favorite shared meals. Be specific: why does this experience stand out in your memory? Who were the people involved? What was the setting?
3. Some shared meals are large and boisterous. What do you find attractive about this sort of gathering at the table? Do you see parallels between what works for you in the context of a large shared meal and what works for you in the context of gathered worship?
4. Some shared meals are smaller and more intimate. What do you find attractive about this sort of gathering? How might gatherings like this nourish your spiritual life?
5. Take a moment to dream. If you could snap your fingers and make it happen, what sort of a shared meal would you arrange? Where would you place your table? Who would you invite? What sort of food would you serve? What would you like to see happen at this event?
6. To what extent have you experienced a place at God's table? If you've had this sort of experience, what was it like? If you haven't experienced this yet (or even if you have), what do you *hope* it will be like?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

ENOUGH FOR EVERYONE

The disciples were tired and hungry. Jesus said, “Come with me by yourselves to a quiet place where we can rest” (Mark 6:31). They climbed aboard a boat and traveled across the Sea of Galilee to an uninhabited stretch of shoreline. To their surprise, they found a large crowd was already waiting for them.

The disciples were still hoping for a little rest. They said to Jesus, “We’re in the middle of nowhere. The hour is growing late. We need to send these people away, so they can find something to eat before it gets dark.”

Jesus told his followers, “You feed them.”

The disciples looked out at large crowd in disbelief. “It would cost a small fortune to feed so many people! Besides, even if we had the money, where would buy the food? We’re in the *wilderness*! No one is going to deliver pizza out here.”

Jesus asked his disciples to take inventory. They reported five loaves of bread and two fish. Reluctantly, Andrew surrendered his half-eaten package of peanut M&Ms. Jesus had the crowd sit down in groups of fifty and one hundred. He blessed the food and sent it around to everyone.

Everyone ate and had enough. When the disciples gathered up the leftovers, each of them received a full basket of food. Each of them received an unexpected bounty.

When we gather at God’s table, we can be confident there is enough. Even in the wilderness, when 5000 people show up unexpectedly for dinner, God provides more than enough for everyone. God provides mana in the dessert. For his first miracle, Jesus provided an abundance of wine at the wedding feast. At God’s table, there is enough for everyone.

To what extent can you trust in God to provide? What has made it hard for you to trust? What makes it easier?



ENOUGH
ANGEL

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For this discussion, please reflect on how you have experienced “abundance” and “scarcity” in your life. To what extent does abundance feel like a gift to you? To what extent do you feel like abundance is something you must earn?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to reflect on “having enough.” After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. Using only a word or short phrase, what is something that you trust in God to provide?
2. When everyone has had the opportunity to speak, say more about your experience of God’s provision. What do you expect from God? As you think about them now, do your expectations sound big or small?
3. How do you recognize what is “enough” for you? Have you ever had to change your understanding of what is enough?
4. Some scholars have suggested that the “feeding of the 5000” was possible because the people who were present that evening all contributed the food they brought. If that is what happened, would it still be “miraculous?”
5. To what extent does an attitude of abundance *produce* abundance? Maybe the “feeding of the 5000” is an example of this. To what extent does an attitude of scarcity produce scarcity? Do you have any examples?
6. If God is willing to provide in abundance, why do some people live in poverty?
7. What is something that you need, right now? Have you asked God to provide it? What barriers do you feel about asking? What sort of reply do you expect?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

SLOW FOOD

No one has ever said to me, “Pizza? Chocolate? Home-grown tomatoes? They’re okay, I guess. Personally, I find satisfaction in a bucket of nutritious green paste from Costco.” When it comes to food, we want more than nutrition. When we sit down to eat, most of us are looking for something more than fuel. Food *means* something to us. Food can express love or playfulness or celebration. Food can speak to us... if we listen.

Over the last few years, a “Slow Food” movement has taken root. This movement reminds us that every meal can be special – if we savor the process. Of course, eating is part of the process, but so is choosing the ingredients and working in the kitchen.

As you know, some people look at a tomato and think, “If we pick this while it’s still hard and green, we can ship it to the grocery store and it won’t get squishy.” They are asking questions about profit and loss. Very different questions can be asked of a tomato: How does it taste? How does it smell? Instead of assuming that fastest and cheapest is always best, the Slow Food movement invites us to be more mindful of what we eat – to savor every step in the process.

When we “Come to the Table” of God’s presence, surely God serves something better than the spiritual equivalent of nutritious green paste (made from hard, green tomatoes?). Speaking on God’s behalf, the prophet Isaiah invites us, “Come, all you who are thirsty, come to the waters; and you who have no money, come, buy and eat! Come, buy wine and milk without money and without cost. Why spend money on what is not bread, and your labor on what does not satisfy? Listen, listen to me, and eat what is good, and your soul will delight in the richest of fare (Isaiah 55:1-2).”

Maybe the Quaker emphasis on silence is like a “Slow Food” movement of the soul. Given the hectic pace of our lives, it would be easy to “gobble” whatever God sets before us (looking, perhaps, for God’s Drive-Thru window?). The Quaker habit of silence and careful listening reminds us to slow down and **notice** what God is doing. Love? Playfulness? Celebration? What do you find at the Table?

What are the foods that you *savor*? What sort of food do you associate with celebration? What sort of food do you associate with consolation or rest? Please reflect on the sort of food that *means something* to you. As you envision yourself at the Table of God’s presence, what sort of food suits the occasion?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider the menu. How does God entice you to *sit down* for a meal? After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on how God might entice you to a sit-down meal, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. When everyone has shared briefly, say more about how you envision God working in your life. Have you ever had a sense that God has prepared something special for you? If God *did* prepare a special “meal” for you, how would you know? How would you know it was “special?” How would you know it was from God?
3. Take a moment to talk about the “Slow Food” movement? How does this movement speak to a need in our society? Do you recognize this same need in yourself? Is slow food inherently more spiritual than fast food?
4. In your life, what is the spiritual equivalent of a drive-thru window?
5. In your life, what is the spiritual equivalent of nutritious green paste (something that meets your needs, but without flavor or pizzaz)? When is green paste enough? When do you long for more? In your experience, what does it take to get something more rewarding?
6. The Slow Food movement recognizes that the *process* is part of the *experience*. How does God invite you into the process of your own special banquet?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

BUILDS STRONG BODIES

When I was in grade school, some of my classmates were known to eat Elmer's Glue. I could never eat anything so *white*. It seemed unnatural to me. Which probably also explains why I've never wanted to eat Wonder Bread. At the time, commercials for Wonder Bread were ubiquitous. They promised Wonder Bread would "build strong bodies in 12 ways!" That sounds like a drug to me: just say NO.

On the other hand, I really *wanted* to believe that Frosted Flakes could be part of a nutritious breakfast. That was another carefully scripted promise from the TV-land of my childhood. I suppose Frosted Flakes can be part of a nutritious breakfast... if you have a nutritious breakfast and then eat three Frosted Flakes for dessert. I can remember taking comfort in the list of vitamins and minerals on the back of the cereal box. You never see numbers like that on an apple.

Diet, caffeine-free cola is what happens when you reverse the polarity of Frosted Flakes. Instead of *adding* thiamin and vitamin D, diet cola is rendered (mostly) harmless by what we *remove*. Of course, mitigating against the worst effects of junk food is not the same as eating a healthy diet.

When God prepares a place for us at the Table, God is nourishing us for a purpose. God cares about building a healthy body. At the Table, we are given more than enough. The Psalmist declares, "our cup overflows." Isaiah assures us that "our soul will delight in the richest of fare." We get all the good stuff in abundance. It's just as true that God nourishes us *for a purpose*. God told Abraham, "I will bless you, so that you will be a blessing for many. All the nations of the world will be blessed through you." Jesus told his followers, "Abide in me and you will bear much fruit." God invites us to the Table – in part – so that we can be built-up for service.

What we find at God's table is a delight for our senses. It is also a source of strength for the work we are given. As we find ourselves at the Table of God's presence, how do we take in what delights us *and* take in what will strengthen us for the road ahead?

For this discussion, please reflect on the multi-grain, low-fat, vitamin-fortified, body-building cuisine of God's Table. When you find yourself at the Table of God's presence, do you experience a distinction between what is "sweet" and what is "healthy?" If you can't speak from experience, what do you imagine to be true? Does God equip us for service on a diet of sweets?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider these questions. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on the way God calls us to the table *for the purpose* of bearing fruit, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. After everyone has had a chance to speak, say more about your experience. What is the sweetest fare you find at God's Table (Peace? Acceptance? Wisdom?)? Is this also what equips you to serve others? If so, how? If not, how do you find nourishment for service?
3. Are there times when you come to the Table *primarily* to receive strength for the road ahead? Is that experience different from your other times at the Table?
4. What is the spiritual equivalent of Frosted Flakes for you? What do you *want* to be part of a balanced diet (but maybe need to take in moderation)? What is the spiritual equivalent to Diet Coke? What do you want to keep, if all the offending properties can be removed?
5. Do you think God changes our palate over time, so what is healthy for us also starts to "taste" the best? Can you speak to this from your own experience?
6. Is the generosity of God's invitation diminished if we are *both* the "guest of honor" and "workers fed to serve others?" Please reflect on your answer.

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

SEATING CHART

James and John were thinking ahead – to the day when Jesus would reign in glory. So they came to Jesus with a request: “Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left.” James and John were among the first to suggest a seating chart in Heaven.

There **is** a seating chart at the Nobel Prize banquet. You can find place cards at wedding receptions and even at some large family gatherings. We give careful thought to where people sit. Ideally, a seating chart helps *everyone* have a good time. Here’s some advice from www.perfecttableplan.com: “Try to put each person next to at least one person they already know. People are more likely to get on well if they are similar ages or have similar interests. It might not be a good idea to put your ‘alternative lifestyle’ friend with the piercings and tattoos next to your 80-year-old grandmother. A little common sense goes a long way.” Do you think that God follows a similar etiquette when sending out invitations to the Table?

When you think about it, most churches are fairly homogenous. There are black churches, conservative churches, alternative churches and gay churches (to name a few). To what extent does God intentionally bring people with similar outlooks together at one table?

At the same time, we are called to see *all people* as our brothers and sisters: we are *all* the children of one God. To what extent do we come to the Table *expecting* to rub elbows with people who are different from ourselves? How might God use these very differences to feed us?

Here’s one last observation on the seating chart (from a different James): “Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in shabby clothes also comes in. If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, ‘Here’s a good seat for you,’ but say to the poor man, ‘You stand there’ or ‘Sit on the floor by my feet,’ have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?”

For this discussion, please reflect on your companions at God’s Table. When you come to the Table, who is most likely to be with you? Is there anyone with whom you could not share a place at the Table? How do other people enrich (or diminish) your experience at the Table of God’s presence?

Please take five or ten minutes of silence to consider what it means to be one guest among many at God’s Table. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on sitting at the Table of God’s presence in the company of other people, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind for you?
2. After everyone has had a chance to speak briefly, say more about your experience. To what extent do you find yourself at the Table with people who are similar? To what extent do you find yourself at the Table with people who are very different? Are you more likely to be the ‘alternative lifestyle’ friend or the 80-year-old grandmother?
3. As you were growing up, did you have a regular seat at the family table? Did your position at the table say anything about your role in the family? Where do you sit now? Do you have a regular seat in meeting for worship? How does your physical location (and the presence of certain people around you) influence your experience of worship?
4. As a community, are there ways in which we discriminate between different sorts of visitors? Who is made comfortable? Who is left to fend for themselves?
5. What sort of people do you hope to find at the Table of God’s presence? Why? What sort of people are you afraid you will find? Why?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

“NO COKE, PEPSI”

Years ago, John Belushi played the owner of the Olympia Café on Saturday Night Live. The whole skit had a very thin premise: everyone who worked at the café spoke with a heavy Greek accent – and there were only three things on the menu. A cheeseburger was the main event. Customers who tried to order french fries were told, “No fry. Chip” (pronounced, “cheep”). Customers who tried to order a Coke or root beer were told, “No Coke. Pepsi.”

Whenever someone ordered a cheeseburger, Belushi would shout to his cook, “Chee’bugga!” The cook would acknowledge each order by shouting back “Chee’bugga!” At least a third of the skit consists of people shouting “Chee’bugga! Chee’bugga!” Strangely hilarious. Thirty years later, I can’t order a cheeseburger without remembering this skit.

Whenever someone who orders a Coke is asked, “Is Pepsi okay?” I think of John Belushi – and Ron Crosby, but that’s another story. Ron makes a point of ordering “cola.” Sometimes, he even orders “the cola du jour.” Despite his deliberate use of the generic, he’s still asked, “Is Pepsi okay?”).

When you go to a restaurant, you’re limited to the house cola. The menu is even more limited when you’re a guest in someone’s home. Very few hosts will offer you a plate of macaroni & cheese just because you turn up your nose at the main dish (although a thoughtful host may provide this option to guests under the age of 8). For the most part, we are expected to sample whatever the host sets before us. Guests are discouraged from hiding their food under napkins or feeding it to nearby pets.

When we come to the Table of God’s Presence, we come as guests. God sets the menu. What if God presents us with a dish that does not appeal to us? Before he was arrested, Jesus asked, “Please let this cup pass.” If Jesus could feel this way at God’s Table, what about the rest of us? As we spend time in God’s presence, we are changed. Some of those changes can be difficult. Some of what God sets before us may dampen our appetites. Then what? Is Pepsi okay?

For this discussion, please reflect on what it means for God to set the menu. What has been your experience? Has God ever set something “unpalatable” before you? What happened?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider how being a “guest” at God’s table limits our ability to control what happens. To what extent do you take comfort in knowing God will set the menu? To what extent is this realization unsettling? After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you think about God “setting the menu,” what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. After everyone has spoken briefly, say more about your experience. Have you ever come to the Table and found something you didn’t expect? Something you didn’t like? How did it turn out? Did you “take a bite” anyway?
3. As a guest, have you ever *forced yourself* to eat something that didn’t look appealing? Ever have an analogous experience at God’s Table?
4. To what extent should we expect to exercise our *will* when we come to God’s Table (as in, “I *will* eat that!”)? When Jesus accepted his arrest and execution, was it *will* that allowed him to move forward? Explain your answer.
5. People’s taste preference tends to change over time: the favorite foods of today were unknown to us yesterday (or maybe even unappreciated). To what extent does God change our “taste preference” to fit the Menu we are given?
6. If you had a choice, would you rather come to the Table and find the same menu day after day, or would you like to be surprised by something new and different? If you would like a change in the menu, how *often* would you like the menu to change?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

POTLUCK

Our community's approach to potluck is decidedly *laissez-faire*. People are free to bring whatever they want. Even those who come empty-handed are invited to stay and eat with us. No one seems terribly upset if the desserts outnumber everything else on the table. Some months we enjoy a great abundance of breads, salads and hot food. On other months, the choices are few. No one seems to mind.

Other churches are much more deliberate when the time comes for a potluck. People are *assigned* certain dishes, based upon an alphabetical sorting of last names. Assigning dishes by name is one way to control the ratio of desserts to salads.

Our community's approach to potluck reveals something quite interesting about our shared culture. Another church might place a higher value on predictability (or maybe even a balanced diet). We prefer to emphasize flexibility and freedom. We also prefer to invest authority in the *individual* rather than in a centralized "decider." Instead of asking people to conform to the dictates of an overarching plan (no matter how fair or useful it might be), we assume that everything will turn out for the best if individuals are free to do what feels right to them.

While it is interesting to note the different cultural approaches to potluck, the basic idea remains the same: Everyone contributes; Everyone benefits. When we come to the Table of God's Presence, part of what God provides to each of us is an *opportunity to contribute*. At least some of the time, the bounty we find at God's Table is served potluck-style. We are nourished by what others bring to the Table. We, in turn, bring something that helps provide nourishment for others. This is a gift from God! Our fruitfulness is the product of God's Spirit working within us. Jesus describes it this way: "I am the vine; you are the branches. Those who remain in me and I in them will bear much fruit" (John 15:5). When we receive nourishment from the Source, we will be fruitful. Our fruitfulness can then enrich the lives of others.

When we come to the Table, it is God who provides. Sometimes, though, God chooses to provide for us *through* one another.

For this discussion, please reflect on the ways in which God "feeds" us through one another. What opportunities have you received to contribute to God's holy potluck? When you come to the Table, do you receive from the contributions of others?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider how the God's Table can be like a potluck. After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on the potluck aspect of God's Table, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. When everyone has had a chance to speak, say more about your experience. How has God nourished you through the fruitfulness of others? How has God provided you with opportunities to nourish others?
3. As you think about your contribution to God's holy potluck, to what extent do you see a pattern in what you provide (I think of Meredith's regular contribution of baked beans)? To what extent are you surprised by what nourishes others?
4. We happen to have a *laissez-faire* attitude toward potlucks. To what extent does this attitude carry over to the way in which we nourish each other spiritually? What are the benefits of letting each individual contribute as he or she is led? What are the benefits of creating more structure (the equivalent of assigning dishes by name)?
5. One of my seminary professors once told me, "There is no private revelation. Anything God reveals is for the blessing of a community." Do you agree with that statement? Is every gift of God destined for a potluck table?
6. Some people won't stay for potluck if they have forgotten to bring a contribution. Is there a similar dynamic at God's Table? What helps people feel comfortable about staying?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.

TAKEOUT FOOD

In the mid-1980's, McDonald's advertised an exciting new concept in fast food. More specifically, it was a new concept in *packaging*. Their innovative burger came in two parts: a *hot side* and a *cool side*. The segregation was meant to keep the lettuce-pickle-tomato side of each sandwich cool and crispy until you were ready to eat. The public's response was a collective yawn.

Although the "McDLT" was relegated to the dustbin of history, we like food that we can take with us. Takeout cartons from Chinese restaurants are instantly recognizable. So are pizza boxes and paper cups. Long before McDonald's dotted the landscape, Cornish miners wanted something they could eat at work. The mines were filthy and polluted with toxins. The Cornish pasty was invented, so miners could use the thick crust as something like a disposable "handle" for the rest of the meal.

Which brings us to Psalm 23: "The Lord is my shepherd; I will never be in need..." Clearly, the Psalmist is celebrating God's generous care. The writer even uses the imagery of a Table: "You prepare a table before me... my cup overflows." This psalm offers more than poetic praise for God's provision. It reminds us that God's bounty is something that we can take with us.

The Table of God is something that we can *take with us* into the darkest corners of our life. "I may walk through valleys as dark as death, but I won't be afraid. You are with me, and your shepherd's rod makes me feel safe. You treat me to a feast, while my enemies watch" (Psalm 23:4-5a). Even in the presence of watching enemies, God's Table is something we can know. Even in valleys as dark as death, God's Table can become so real to us that we are defined by our place at the table and not by our place in the valley.

It takes practice. It takes practice to remember that *whatever else* is happening in our lives, we sit as honored guests at the bountiful Table of God. Is it possible to be *so mindful* of our place at the Table, that this joyful realization is the *primary* reality of our lives? Even when the way is dark? Even when the stars are gone?

For this discussion, please reflect on what it means to live in constant awareness of our place at God's Table. Is it possible to "find comfort" at a metaphorical Table while everything else is falling apart?

Take five or ten minutes of silence to consider how the God's Table can fill our vision – so that it eclipses every other circumstance of our lives. Have you ever experienced anything like this? Would you want to? After the silence, the facilitator can open worship sharing by asking these questions (feel free to edit, omit or add questions!):

1. As you reflect on "taking" your sense of God's presence into the different aspects of your life, what is a word or short phrase that comes to mind?
2. When everyone has had a chance to speak, say more about your experience. Have you ever consciously taken God's presence with you into a difficult situation? Have you ever been surprised to find a Table prepared for you in the "presence of enemies?" How did having a sense of God's presence change the experience for you?
3. What helps you *stay mindful* of God's presence, even when the circumstances of your life are difficult? Have you ever set routines for yourself that help you stay mindful?
4. Like the people who marketed the McDLT, there is a danger that we will mistake an interesting *package* for something of *substance*. That is, there is a danger that we will habitually do the things that remind us to connect with God without ever *actually* connecting with God. What helps your experience of God to stay fresh and real? Although it's never ideal, are there ever times when the packing is "enough?"
5. Think about the dark valleys of shadow and death in your life right now. What are the scary and lonely places? What would it be like to be at God's Table in those places?

Close worship sharing with a time of silence (so everyone can reflect on what was said). When hearts are clear, you may draw the exercise to a close.