

LIFE TOGETHER STUDY GUIDE

From *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

For Home Groups and Community Group at Capchurch


Fall 2009

[N.B. the page numbers referenced may vary depending upon which printing of *Life Together* you are using]

WEEK #1: THE NATURE OF COMMUNITY.

- Goal: to understand Bonhoeffer's theology of community and its implications
- *Life Together* pp. 17-39;

1. BONHOEFFER'S LIFE AS THE CONTEXT FOR HIS WRITING.

- a. Bonhoeffer was born in 1906 in eastern Germany. He decided as a teenager to study theology and presented his doctoral thesis at the age of 21. He pastored two German congregations in London and an underground seminary in Germany out of which *Life Together* was written. In 1933 he gave a radio lecture criticizing Hitler and the idol he was becoming. Bonhoeffer joined the resistance and participated in the plot to assassinate Hitler. He was arrested by the Germans, spent 2.5 years in prison and was hanged by the Nazis on April 9, 1945, just hours before the Allies liberated the camp where he was being held.
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- b. Read the quote from the Psalms and from Martin Luther on p. 17.
- How do you think the bible and his current life experience shaped Bonhoeffer's view of Christian community?
- c. How do the Bible and your current life experience shape your view of Christian community?

2. COMMUNITY IN AND THROUGH JESUS CHRIST

- a. Bonhoeffer states his theology of community on p. 21 and further defines it with two statements ["first" on p. 21 and "second" on p. 23].
- What do you make of this definition of community?
- b. Read pp. 25-26 where Bonhoeffer expands his definition of community.
- How do you conceive of community differently or similarly?
 - [Note: Bonhoeffer had a bit of a "mystical" view of Christian relationships. You will see he uses the language of relate to another Christian only in and through Jesus Christ—this is Bonhoeffer's way of saying the we don't have "direct" relationships with others but relate to them only from Christ's view of self and other—that is the "mystical" part]
- c. On pp. 27 Bonhoeffer suggests that disillusionment in Christian community is not only to be expected but it is part of God working the gospel in Christians so that they learn to live by forgiveness and not by false expectations and idealism.

- i. How does this notion transform your expectation and experience of community?
- d. Starting on pp. 32 Bonhoeffer contrasts human love with God's love and human community with a community of the Spirit.
 - i. Make a list of the contrasts mentioned on pp. 31-39.
 - ii. How have you experience Spirit based community life?

WEEK #2: THE DAY WITH OTHERS

- Goal: to learn how community functions through the graces God gives
 - *Life Together* pp. 40-75;
1. Context: Bonhoeffer wrote this material out of the life situation of living in community with students in the underground Lutheran seminary in Germany. As a result the material is most applicable to cloistered communities. Yet there are principles that still apply to gathered and dispersed communities like CapChruch. See what you think applies as you work through this chapter.
 2. How do you begin your day? How is this different than the community in which Bonhoeffer is writing?
 3. Beginning on page 47, Bonhoeffer addresses the meaning and value of praying the book of the Psalms. What are three reasons he provides (pg.47-50)? What have you/your home group discovered about prayer and the psalms?
 4. From pages 50-57, Bonhoeffer takes up the Christian community's experience of the Bible. What do you make of his statement on p. 54, "it is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, to His Son Jesus Christ, than to seek what God intends for us today."?
 5. What dangers does Bonhoeffer warn us against as we read Scripture within the Christian community? What would you say to our generation about the Bible and community?
 6. According to Bonhoeffer, what is the role of music and hymnody in the Church? (p. 59). Therefore, what benefits do church music, singing, etc. give to our life in the Church community?
 7. Bonhoeffer suggests a good rhythm of life for our Christian faith. Name some ways in which we have complicated our lives, therefore making such a rhythm and pattern of life more difficult.



Bonhoeffer's family



Bonhoeffer with students



Crematorium at Flossenbuerg where Bonhoeffer's body was cremated after hanging

WEEK #3: MINISTRY TO ONE ANOTHER

- Goal: to learn how give and take works in community
 - *Life Together* pp. 90-109;
1. What does Bonhoeffer mean by the use of the word “ministry”?
 2. Holding one’s tongue
 - a. What is dangerous about the tongue?
 - b. What does Bonhoeffer suggest is a goal for tongue use in Christian community?
 - c. How have you made Christians in your own image in community? With what result?
 - d. How does “inclusion” work practically for Bonhoeffer? (p. 94f).
 3. Meekness
 - a. What do you make of Bonhoeffer’s statement (p. 95) “only he/she who lives by the forgiveness of his/her sin in Jesus Christ will rightly think little of himself/herself.”?
 - b. What do you make of Bonhoeffer’s statement (p. 95) “the desire for one’s own honour hinders faith. One who seeks his own honour is no longer seeking God and his neighbour.”?
 - c. How do you think meekness really works and benefits community?
 4. Listening
 - a. What kind of listening does Bonhoeffer have in mind for us (p. 97 ff)?
 - b. What do you make of Bonhoeffer’s statement, “he who can no longer listen to his brother will soon be no longer listening to God either...this is the beginning of death of spiritual life...”?
 5. Helping
 - a. What is the two-fold aspect of helpfulness (p. 99)?
 - b. What do you make of Bonhoeffer’s theology of “interruption”?
 6. Bearing
 - a. What do you make of Bonhoeffer’s statements
 - i. “the brother is a burden to the Christian, precisely because he is a brother”
 - ii. “it is only when he is a burden that another person is really a brother and not merely an object...”
 - b. What role does our freedom as Christians play in bearing one another’s burdens (p. 100-103)? Luther once wrote in his famous work on Christian freedom, “A Christian is a perfectly free lord of all, subject to none. A Christian is a perfectly dutiful servant of all, subject to all.” (Cf. 1 Cor. 9:19; Rom. 13:8). What insight does Luther add to the ministry of bearing as discussed by Bonhoeffer?
 - i. What is your experience of bearing and forgiving one another in the area of your sins (p. 102)?
 7. Proclaiming

- a. In a day and age where the phrase “you can’t judge me” (or any variation on that theme) is common, what does Bonhoeffer tell us is unavoidable (p. 107)? How do Christians properly judge matters in life? Cf. Galatians 1:6-10; 1 Timothy 6:3-5; 2 Timothy 1:8-14, 3:1-5
 - b. What do you make of Bonhoeffer’s statements
 - i. “Nothing can be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin.”
 - ii. “Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back for the path of sin.”
 - iii. [paraphrase from p. 108] God has put the word in our mouths to be spoken through us in order to bind the broken community.
8. Authority
- a. Genuine authority and the authority that the world values are two different things.
 - i. What are the foundations and goals of these two different views on authority? For example, where does authority come from?
 - ii. How is authority properly understood within the Christian community? Mt. 28:18; Rom. 13:1.

WEEK #4: CONFESSION AND COMMUNION

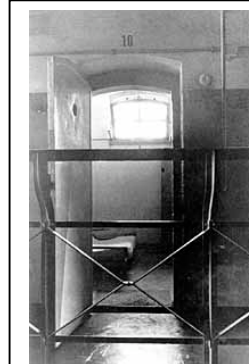
- Goal: to learn how to confess and forgive in community
 - *Life Together* pp. 110-122;
1. Bonhoeffer begins the chapter on *Confession and Communion* by saying that he who is alone with his sin is utterly alone.
 - a. Why is it dangerous to live alone in our sin?
 - b. What comfort does confession offer us? 1 John 1:9; Psalm 51.
 2. The effect of sin and confession upon the community
 - a. What is the effect of individual’s sin upon the whole community?
 - b. What effect does the confessed sin have on the community?
 - c. Since we as a community suffer the effects of one another’s sin and the blessings of Christ’s forgiveness, how can we challenge, confess, and speak into one another’s lives? (p. 112-113). 1 Cor. 12:12-26; 2 Cor. 1:7
 3. What is the importance of confessing our sins to one another in the community?
 4. What breakthrough does Bonhoeffer describe that follows confession? (p. 112-115). James 5:16.
 5. According to Bonhoeffer, what are two dangers that face a Christian community that practices confession with each other?
 - a. How do we avoid these dangers?
 - b. What does the confession of sins prepare us for? How?
 6. How does the Lord’s Supper bind us together as a Christian community gathered together under God’s Word? Cf. 1 Corinthians 10:14-22. Acts 2:42-44.

WEEK #5: THE DAY ALONE (optional)

- Goal: to learn how spending time alone with God enriches the community
 - *Life Together* pp. 76-89;
1. However, can a Christian community gather together for the wrong reasons? Cf. p. 76.
 2. “Let him who cannot be alone beware of community...but the reverse is also true: Let him who is not in community beware of being alone” (p.77). These two statements appear to be paradoxical.
 - a. What does he mean by saying this?
 - b. What does Bonhoeffer want us to learn from these two statements?
 3. For all the benefits of silence, Bonhoeffer also indicates that there is a negative silence, “There is such a thing as forbidden, self-indulgent silence, a proud offensive silence.”
 - a. Do you think that this quote and portions of this page refer to his outspoken activities against the Nazis or is that inferring too much?
 - b. What is the Christian response to public events of tragedy and or error?
 4. What do you think of the three motifs does Bonhoeffer use to focus the devotional time alone?
 5. The Word and Prayer
 - a. What does Bonhoeffer see as the purpose of meditation upon God’s Word? (Cf. p. 81-84).
 - b. With whom and from where does Christian prayer, both public and private, begin? (Cf. p.84-85).
 - c. How does Bonhoeffer define intercession in distinction from prayer (Cf. p. 85-87). Are there ways we can continue this practice?
 6. What does Bonhoeffer see as the difference between testing and temptation?
 - a. Explain using: 1 Corinthians 10:12-13; Hebrews 4:15; James 1:3; Matthew 4:1-11.
 7. In what ways does this chapter help you rethink your time alone with God?



Bonhoeffer opposed the state church that placed the swastika in the middle of the cross



Bonhoeffer’s cell in Tegel Prison