

Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community Study Guide

Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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Plot Summary

Dietrich Bonhoeffer receives a call in 1935 to take charge of an illegal, secret seminary for the training of young pastors in Finkenwalde, Germany. He is living in England at the time to avoid continuing conflict as a Christian pastor and theologian with his homeland Germany's Nazi government. He previously broadcasts public criticism of the German people in 1933 for following their leader Hitler. Risking severe persecution, he accepts the position and returns to Germany in 1935. Bonhoeffer becomes the director of the seminary, leading the seminarians in life together as a Christian community of fellowship. The common life they share provides the spiritual content and context for *Life Together*, which is the English translation of the German text *Gemeinsames Leben*, written in 1938. This non-fiction account occurs within the historical context of Nazi Germany from 1935 to 1945. The narrative is an illustration of spiritual life in the illegal secret Protestant seminary. Plot of the storyline describes Christian practices, beliefs and principles by which Bonhoeffer leads the seminarians in daily life together. Content of the work is a guide to the daily spiritual devotions of the seminary's community life.

Throughout this one hundred and twenty-two page non-fiction work, Bonhoeffer proclaims his theology and philosophy as a Christian. He describes and supports with numerous Scriptural quotes how a Christian community of fellowship lives a spiritual life together. Bonhoeffer's writing is a statement of his beliefs as a Christian. A non-Christian or even a Christian with moderate knowledge of theology and the Bible may find some of the author's claims unbelievable and difficult to understand or accept. There is no storyline action or any significant interaction among the characters. This book outlines a day's schedule of planned spiritual practices in a Christian community. The day begins with religious devotions in common, progresses through other activities both shared and alone, and ends with evening devotions. The author's fundamental goal is to describe the spiritual values and meaning of life together in Christ that the community shares. Quotes and prayers from the Old and New Testament and Book of Psalms, among other sources, are included within the text.

Bonhoeffer describes the community beginning its day with prayer, meditation, scripture readings and song. Details explain the spiritual significance of devotions the fellowship follows to commune with God. Breakfast together is an opportunity to appreciate the spiritual sense of daily bread and work. Evening devotions brings the community back to its common spiritual life together. After writing two additional books that present his fundamental beliefs, the government forbids Bonhoeffer from further writing or publishing. Hitler's police force, the Gestapo, eventually closes the seminary. In 1939, Bonhoeffer becomes involved in secret plans to overthrow Hitler. He believes that his fundamental requirement as a Christian does not allow him to retreat in pacifism from this political and military conflict. However, in 1945 Hitler's Nazi government hangs Bonhoeffer for his rebellion. His belief in Christ's call to come and die is confirmed by his death as a martyr.



Introduction

Introduction Summary and Analysis

Dietrich Bonhoeffer receives a call in 1935 to take charge of an illegal, secret seminary for the training of young pastors in Finkenwalde, Germany. He is living in England at the time to avoid continuing conflict as a Christian pastor and theologian with his homeland Germany's Nazi government. He previously broadcasts public criticism of the German people in 1933 for following Hitler. Despite the risk of persecution, he accepts the position and returns to Germany in 1935. Bonhoeffer becomes the director of the seminary where he leads the seminarians in life together as a Christian community of fellowship. The common life they share provides the spiritual content and context for *Life Together*, which is the English translation of the German text *Gemeinsames Leben*, written by him in 1938. This non-fiction account occurs within the historical context of Nazi Germany during the period of 1935 to 1945. The narrative is an illustration of spiritual life in the illegal secret Protestant seminary. Plot of the storyline describes Christian practices, beliefs and principles by which Bonhoeffer leads the seminarians in daily life together. Content of the work is a guide to the daily spiritual devotions of the seminary's community life.

The author, Dietrich Bonhoeffer, is executed by order of the Nazi Heinrich Himmler. He is hanged in 1945 in the Flossenburg concentration camp. Ten years later the pastors in Bavaria, Germany erect a churchyard monument that commemorates him as a witness of Jesus Christ. His martyrdom is considered the ultimate result of a Christian believer that confronts the world. As a child Bonhoeffer learns that Christianity is not just an idea or a set of guidelines; he believes that Christianity demands one to be a responsible, obedient disciple in personal and public life. His writing states a belief that Christ's call is to come and die. The example of his life as a Christian pastor and his death as a martyr confirms the strength of his faith and belief in Christ.

He is raised in a family of seven children in Berlin, Germany. At sixteen years old he decides to study theology. While studying he is taught by Karl Barth, a well-known theologian. At twenty-one he presents his doctoral thesis and dissertation titled *Act and Being*. Bonhoeffer is admitted to the theological faculty as an instructor. In 1930 he attends Union Theological Seminary in New York where he studies Niebuhr who is another Protestant theologian. Bonhoeffer is fascinated by American Negro spirituals. He introduces his students to songs like *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*. Bonhoeffer teaches systematic theology and writes his first book, *Creation and Fall* on returning to Berlin. He becomes pastor to the students in a technical school. His life as a theology student, instructor and pastor is a response to the first half of his belief in Christ's call to come and die. The second half of his belief in Christ's call to come and die is soon tested.

In 1933, Bonhoeffer broadcasts a radio lecture in Berlin. The author is about to start on a path that will challenge the second half of his belief in the call of Christ. He accuses the German public of supporting a leader, Hitler, who misleads them. The radio



broadcast is stopped before he finishes. Bonhoeffer refuses to cooperate with Hitler's Nazi government. Bonhoeffer leaves Germany to become pastor of German congregations in London, England and plans to study pacifism in India. During this period of self-imposed exile Bonhoeffer avoids Nazi conflict and the call of Christ to die. His plan is interrupted by a call for him to lead an illegal, secret seminary to train young pastors in Finkenwalde, Germany. He accepts the appointment in 1935 and returns to Germany. Bonhoeffer writes about the community life he shares with seminarians there as the spiritual content for *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* in 1938. The seminary leadership and training position eventually puts him back in direct conflict with the Nazi government and the second half of Christ's call to die.

Bonhoeffer writes two additional books that distill his fundamental beliefs before the government forbids him to write or publish. Hitler's police force, the Gestapo, closes the seminary and Bonhoeffer subsequently becomes involved in secret plans to overthrow Hitler. The author believes life as a Christian does not allow him to retreat from political conflict. In 1939 he commits himself to support the Church and Resistance movement. Although he is forbidden to teach, write or publish by Hitler's government, he travels throughout Germany preaching and speaking to secret groups. In 1943 the Nazis arrest Bonhoeffer, his sister and his brother-in-law. They are held in a military prison until October 1944. Prison guards help him to preserve his writings and preach to other prisoners. He is transferred from prison to prison and loses contact with the outside world, but maintains a happy and joyous manner according to his fellow prisoners. On April 8, 1945, Bonhoeffer finishes a prayer in the service he is conducting. Two civilians enter the cell to take him to the gallows and he is hanged the next day. The call of Christ to come and die that he believes and accepts is fulfilled when he dies as a Christian martyr.



Chapter 1, Community

Chapter 1, Community Summary and Analysis

Bonhoeffer draws upon examples and passages from the Bible to establish how the community should live together. Scripture offers guidelines and rules for Christians to use when following the example of Jesus Christ. Christ comes to bring peace on earth. While on earth Jesus Christ lives among the enemies of God. His disciples leave Him alone and abandoned when He dies on the cross. He is crucified on the cross while surrounded by evildoers and mockers. Similarly, Bonhoeffer professes that the duty of a Christian is to follow Christ's example. A Christian is required to bring peace while living among the enemies of God. Christians must spread throughout the world to live among unbelievers. The Bible claims that the followers of Christ are the seeds of the Kingdom of God all over the entire world. Followers of Christ are gathered together spiritually and invisibly in Jesus Christ at His death on the cross and resurrection. They believe they will gather again visibly at the end of time. Although they are scattered through the world they believe they remain together spiritually in Jesus Christ. Christians rarely receive the privilege of living together with other Christians according to scripture. The author recognizes an apparent conflict between the Bible teaching that Christians bring peace while living among the enemies of God and living in community. He resolves that seeming difference with other examples from the Bible showing the joy experienced by Christ's followers when they can spend time together.

Christians that are exiled and living alone in far countries with unbelievers can become more enthusiastic about their faith. For example, John the Apocalypticist writes a book of the Bible called the Apocalypse while living in exile on an island near Greece. Bonhoeffer claims that John shared in the heavenly fellowship of Jesus Christ while he lived alone on the island Patmos. Another example is Paul, the imprisoned apostle and writer of many letters in the New Testament section of the Bible. During the last days of his life Paul went to see Timothy, a fellow Christian. Bonhoeffer claims the experience of loneliness enables Christians to recognize in each other the presence of Christ. A short visit with prayer and blessing or a letter from another Christian can comfort a believer in exile. There is no shame in a lone believer longing for the joy and strength that the physical presence of other Christians may provide. The blessings from one meeting shared with another Christian are multiplied when Christians share daily fellowship of life together.

Not all Christians receive the blessings of visible fellowship on earth. Neither is the gift of shared visible community available in the same amount to all. Some Christians gather and worship together only with their own family or just on Sundays. Bonhoeffer's young seminarians share a common life together before ordination. The author claims that some Christians are beginning to recognize communal life once again as a gift of grace. The first-century Christians live in community. His comment about recognizing that form of life is used to bridge any scriptural difference of opinion from life in exile to community life. The privilege of living together in visible fellowship is a gift from the



grace of God. Christian life together is an opportunity to experience fellowship of the spiritual-physical creatures of God. The Christian brethren in fellowship receive each other in reverence, humility and joy as they would the Lord. Fellowship is a gift of grace for which they should be thankful. In addition to being a gift, Bonhoeffer supports his belief in Christian community through a discussion of its primary elements. Beliefs require one to suspend rigorous and rational logic in favor of faith and acceptance of the meaning proposed. As one's faith grows, presumably the internal logic and meaning of the belief grows as well.

It is only through Jesus Christ that members of a Christian community belong to one another. Bonhoeffer claims three elements define the meaning of Christian brethren in fellowship. The elements include that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ, comes to others through Jesus Christ and is chosen from eternity. The meaning that the Christian community fellowship belongs to one another only through and in Jesus Christ is explained by these elements. The explanation is based on spiritual concepts and terms difficult to understand or accept unless one accepts the author's belief system and terms.

The first element defining this meaning is that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. A Christian comes to the realization that his own resources are not adequate and no longer matter. He gives up seeking salvation or deliverance on his own. He no longer behaves to justify himself. A Christian forgoes his personal feelings of guilt or virtue to accept God's claims and justifications. The Christian accepts as fact that death and life can only be found in the Word of God. The Word of God is external to Christian believers. The term "Word of God" originates from God as expressed by various writers in the Bible. Since the Christian Bible is the story of Jesus Christ, the term Word of God is also used to reference Jesus Christ. God's word in Jesus Christ is a believer's source of guilt or innocence. A Christian believer seeks redemption, righteousness, innocence and blessedness in Jesus Christ. Help is available daily for Christians in the Word of God. The message of salvation in Jesus Christ is meant to be shared, for Christians need other believers to strengthen the Word in their hearts. Consequently, Christian fellowship in community is based solely on Jesus Christ.

The second element defining that meaning is that a Christian comes to others through Jesus Christ. Only through Jesus Christ are Christians able to remain in community with one another over time. Human egos tend to incite conflict and strife when living together in society and human nature acting alone eventually disables the capacity to live in peace and understanding of one another. The way to God and each other in community is available only through Christ as Mediator. Only through Jesus Christ are Christians in community enabled to continue to live together in peace, love and service.

The third element defining that meaning is that a Christian is chosen from eternity. The Son of God becomes man and thereby takes on human nature. Since that act Christians belong to Christ in eternity with one another. Christians are united with Him wherever He is in His incarnation, crucifixion and resurrection. Christian believers are in Him spiritually as the Body of Christ. The Body of Christ is a term used in faith by believers to signify this mystical concept. Christians accept as fact the idea that they



share brotherhood through Jesus Christ. Any desires or goals not of Christ are not in Christian brotherhood. Brotherhood can be confused with wishful ideas of religious fellowship. Christian community fellowship is only through and in Jesus Christ.

Scripture provides guidelines and rules for communal life. The Word of God in scripture instructs believers to meet one another as God meets them in Christ. The mercy and forgiveness that Christians receive from God is owed to one another as brotherly love. Through Christ's action on each brother, a community grows more genuine and His work clearly becomes the only vital thing among them. All these concepts proposed by Bonhoeffer are spiritual, not visible and based on faith in scripture. None of the ideas is susceptible to rigorous rational examination or makes sense without belief in faith.

Bonhoeffer makes two further claims in faith that are essential to understand his beliefs about and interpretation of Christian brotherhood. First, he asserts that Christian brotherhood is a divine reality, not an ideal or goal for the members to seek after. The second claim is that Christian brotherhood is in fact a spiritual reality and not merely a psychic or perceived reality. The author claims that a sense of Christian brotherhood is proof that the perceived brotherhood is not real. Since divine reality is spiritual, it cannot be perceived or sensed in non-spiritual terms. Neither claim in faith can be evaluated through reasoning and human perception. One can either believe or see, but faith has no need to see in order to believe. Seeing does not need to believe in order to see. Bonhoeffer uses human reasoning and logic to explain and develop his interpretation and the implications of his claims that originate in scripture and are based on faith.

The author claims a Christian community is not an ideal but a divine reality. He believes the claim because communities based on human wishes or dreams regularly fail. Human emotions are brief and goals are too weak to maintain an enduring community. A society based on feelings may soon be disillusioned and will eventually collapse. The sincerity of a dreamer's intention is not relevant to community formation. Visionaries are often proud and pretentious men that make demands on others and even on their expectations of God. If those demands are not met, failure and accusations may quickly follow in a human community. Bonhoeffer claims that the disillusionment that occurs eventually but certainly in human community can lead Christians to believe in and appreciate a divine reality. A faith-based reality like his enables the results of any event to be spiritualized.

God creates the divine reality of brotherhood in Christ for Christians to share. God alone knows it's true state. Community is a gift of God for which members should be thankful and not criticize. A fellowship with weakness and failure is more worthy of gratitude than complaint. The Christian community must learn to thank God daily for small things before learning to appreciate great things. Pastors and eager members of a congregation in particular ought not complain about the community they receive from God, but should examine themselves instead and thank God for a chance to grow. The more the members learn to recognize that the community basis and strength is in Jesus Christ, the more serene the members may become.



Bonhoeffer also claims that a Christian community is a spiritual reality, not a human reality. As such it is different from any other form of human community. The Bible refers to creations of the Holy Spirit as *spiritual*, and natural urges, powers and capacities of the human spirit as *human*. Christian doctrine professes belief in a Triune God, which means there are three persons in one god. Christians believe that the Holy Spirit is the third person of the Holy Trinity with God the Father and God the Son. The Holy Spirit puts belief in Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior into the hearts of Christian believers according to Bonhoeffer.

The author compares and contrasts several differences between a spiritual and a human community. A spiritual community is based on truth and light compared to the human community, which is based on desire and darkness. The spiritual community is formed with the fellowship of those called by Christ compared to the devout souls that form a human community. Love in a spiritual community is brotherly service, called *agape* in Greek. The love in human community of good and evil desire is called *eros* in Greek, meaning human love. Bonhoeffer claims the Word of God alone rules and binds in a spiritual community. The Word of God and man both rule and bind in a human community. Members of a spiritual community surrender power, honor and influence to the Holy Spirit. Members of a human community desire and seek out power, honor and influence for themselves.

The immediacy or closeness of human reality compared to spiritual reality is an example of the contrast between spiritual and human community. Human desire for community involves immediate contact or connection of one person with another. This human desire for community is like the urge of physical flesh to merge with another. In the human community individuals are close enough to have an influence on other individuals or the whole community. Consequently, weaker individuals can be influenced by stronger persons rather than the Holy Spirit. Similarly, human love focuses on another individual for its own sake and seeks direct contact. Human love is unable to accept the loss of a false love for a genuine fellowship. Human love comes from desire and cannot love an enemy that resists it. Unfulfilled desire easily becomes hatred since human love seeks itself. Human love serves itself and cannot serve the other. In contrast, spiritual love comes from Jesus Christ and serves Him alone. Spiritual love does not desire but only serves, unlike human love, which only desires. Human love cannot understand spiritual love that loves an enemy as a brother. Spiritual love does not desire or originate in the brother or the enemy but in Christ and His Word. Spiritual love does not desire immediacy or the nearness of other human beings since it does not want to make others like oneself.

Spiritual love accepts the image that another receives from Jesus Christ. Human love is experienced in relation to one other while truth becomes secondary to the beloved compared to spiritual love, which is freely given to another for Christ's sake. Spiritual love allows the other freedom to be alone with the Word of God. Unlike human love, there is no attempt to influence others. The most direct way to community fellowship with others is through the mediation of Christ.



A Christian community thrives or dies only to the extent it is not a movement, but sees itself as part of one Christian Church. Relationships that seem to be based on human love such as marriage, family or friendship are more clearly aware of the limitations between human and spiritual love. A spiritual community that is forming is in greater danger that human and spiritual elements may be mixed together. The experience of a short spiritual retreat may create feelings of fellowship that are fatal to the understanding of brotherly fellowship in everyday life. Brotherhood does not hold community together but rather the faith in brotherhood does. The brothers are bound together by faith, not experience. Through Christ alone the community has access, joy and fellowship with one another.



Chapter 2, The Day with Others

Chapter 2, The Day with Others Summary and Analysis

The day's beginning devotions in the community are planned to reflect the life of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer uses the times of day and night as images to illustrate Christ's effect on the world. Christ is born in the dark of night to bring light into the world. He is crucified, suffers and dies on the cross in full light of midday. The light of day turns to darkness at his death and burial in a grave. He conquers death by rising from the dark grave in the light of dawn on Easter. Therefore, the community's daily devotions begin at dawn.

Christ's resurrection from the grave is commemorated as the day when mankind was given new life and salvation. Christ defeats death and sin by rising from the dead for His church that includes all who believe in Him. The early morning of each day is shared by the community of worshippers that believe in the risen Christ. The family community begins its day in the morning with common worship; members of the community assemble to give praise and thanks, read scripture and pray. The dark silence of the night turns into the light of dawn with the fellowship praying and singing. First sounds of the dawn are hymns and the Word of God. The day begins with the community praising the Lord. Christians should begin the new day with hymns and the Word of God while their minds are clear. Concern for the day's work should not start the day. The Bible records that the Old Testament patriarchs Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Joshua rise early to seek God and do His will. The community also begins its day early together with devotions of scripture reading, hymns of the Church and prayer of the fellowship.

Bonhoeffer describes the secret of the Psalter—the Book of Psalms arranged for devotional use—as a major part of the day's early devotions. He claims the Psalter contains a spiritual secret. The Psalter is a significant, historical way to begin common worship services. Specific psalms or passages of a psalm may seem meaningless to one or another individual. Bonhoeffer believes the secret of the Psalter is that it unites the individual and congregation. Psalms join individuals with the prayer of Jesus Christ as intercessor. In praying the psalms together, someone else, in a supernatural sense, is praying, protesting innocence, and invoking God's judgment or suffering. The Body of Christ is in an invisible, spiritual sense on earth praying this prayer that belongs, not to the individual but the whole Body of Christ to the end of time.

Three things are learned in the Psalter. First is praying according to the Word of God based on promises in the psalms. Secondly, prayer of the psalms teaches what one should pray for. Evil thoughts in a prayer of vengeance are inappropriate. A human individual is not innocent, devout, or self-righteous. However, one can pray from the innocence of Christ shared by faith. The Cross of Christ gives the believing Christian a right to these prayers. Thirdly, the psalms teach prayer as a fellowship and an individual



is a small part of the whole prayer of the Church. Only prayer through Jesus Christ has a promise of fulfillment.

Reading the scripture is an essential part of the community. A daily reading of short verses should not replace reading of scripture as a whole. It is the whole and entire Bible that is God's Word. Common devotions in the morning begin with prayer of the psalms, followed by readings from both the Old and New Testaments. Bonhoeffer recommends daily reading and listening to a chapter from the Old Testament and one-half chapter from the New Testament in the morning and in the evening. An adult Christian should understand the chapters of scripture as they are read. Each new chapter builds on the knowledge gained from prior readings. Each person hears the reading of God's Word based on their previous understanding. A long reading may be difficult for a family with members of different ages and understanding to follow.

Reading scripture in the same order that it appears in the Bible may help a listener see how or where God acts for the salvation of all men. For example, the first book of the Bible is Genesis, which describes the beginning of times. The last book of the Bible is Apocalypse, which describes the end of times. All the books of scripture between the first and last book describe other acts of God for the salvation of man. Scripture reveals that Jesus Christ dying is more important than that I shall die. The belief that Jesus Christ rises from the dead is the only reason for the hope that a Christian shall be raised on the Last Day. Scripture illustrates that salvation is "external to us." The reading of Holy Scripture helps teach man's history primarily for the sake of salvation. One cannot help a Christian brother in difficulty or doubt without God's Word. Scripture reading should be done sincerely and objectively in humility. A reader should not identify with the person speaking in the Bible. Scripture reading for the community is not a performance to be practiced. Reading ability grows or lessens with one's spiritual sense and not with one's dramatic ability.

The subsection in Bonhoeffer's work titled singing the new song celebrates God's action. There is one eternal all-encompassing song of praise in the universe that God makes for Himself. Those souls in heaven are already celebrating this song of heavenly fellowship. Those on earth who believe in God unite spiritually with those in heaven who now see God. The earthly song is of believing pilgrims and travelers still on earth. God's revealing Word in Jesus Christ lights their path to heaven. Singing that is not directed to the Lord is self-centered or based on the music. The author claims any singing that is not directed to the Lord is just singing to idols. The community does not sing melodies; it sings praise, thanksgiving, confession and prayer. The earthly singing of worship is based on the Word and singing in unison. Self-importance is less when singing is done together in one voice. A Christian family fellowship may learn as many hymns as they can sing from memory. Bonhoeffer proclaims singing as one is the voice of the Church.

Praying together introduces common prayer. The community speaking for itself can cause difficulties in common devotion. Christians who live together under the Word of God should pray together to God in their own words. Bonhoeffer refers to unstructured and heartfelt prayer of the community as free prayer. The leader of the community says free prayer for the group at the end of devotions. He should pray for the fellowship and



they should support his efforts. Free prayer follows an orderly but more casual form. The leader should pray the free prayer regardless of his mood. Free prayer is mentioned as a customary Christian community practice in the New Testament.

Fellowship of the table follows community devotions when the Word of God, the hymn of the Church and prayer of the fellowship are finished. The Christian family receives daily bread together, gathering in thanksgiving to ask God's blessing. Jesus mentions three kinds of fellowship at table in the Bible: daily fellowship at table; the Lord's Supper; and final table fellowship in the Kingdom of God. Bonhoeffer describes three meanings to fellowship of the table. Initially it means to know Jesus Christ as Lord and Creator with the Father and Holy Spirit as giver of all gifts in the world. Secondly, fellowship acknowledges the whole world is sustained only for Jesus Christ in His Word. All earthly gifts are given to the world because of Christ. Thirdly, the members believe praying for Christ's presence among them unites with His will to be present as He breaks bread for them. Fellowship of daily meals at table is a festive occasion to rejoice and celebrate the working day. Christians have an obligation in fellowship at table. The community asks for and shares its daily bread. Hunger does not occur if no one keeps his own bread to himself. Fellowship at table together reminds Christians they eat perishable bread. Sharing perishable bread enables them to receive imperishable bread from their Father in Heaven.

The day's work begins after the first morning hour with its devotions and fellowship at table and lasts until evening. The Christian understands that the burden and labor of the day gives meaning to prayer. Work without prayer is not work. Work in the world of things is done when one forgets himself and is absorbed in an activity, a cause or the task. Bonhoeffer calls work the *it*. A Christian is able to learn by working to allow himself to be limited by his task. Work is a cure for the laziness and lethargy of the flesh and its passions. A Christian breaks through the "it" of things to the "Thou" of God who makes the work a freeing from oneself. A chore is not made less difficult by the breakthrough. Work is a continuing struggle of human reality. However, the breakthrough unites prayer and work. Christians discover the unity of a day's work through "Thou," which is God. Work of the whole day can become a prayer by doing the task. There is no turning away from the chore to pray. However, there is a real spiritual break through working to the gracious God. The community member's whole day is ordered and disciplined from the morning prayer. The community prays God provide strength to the members to sustain in their work that day.

Noon is an opportunity for a brief rest from the day's work if members are available for the Christian fellowship to gather. This break reminds them that their work does not provide daily bread. Their daily bread is God's gift of grace. Because the day belongs to God, the community accepts His invitation to come and eat at midday. When a day's work is done the fellowship reunites at table for the evening. Evening ends as the day begins with praying Psalms, a hymn, and common prayer as the last shared devotion. Common intercessions are appropriate at the end of the day. The community is weary. The community commends itself into the hands of God for the night. Evening prayers and devotions include formally requesting forgiveness for wrongs done to God, to a brother or to oneself, and can be used to heal any discord of the day. Lastly, the



community asks protection through the night from the devil, terror or sudden death. In sleep the community rests either in the hands of God or the power of evil.

Bonhoeffer schedules the day from the morning devotions to the evening prayers in the life together of the seminarians. All aspects of the community fellowship's day focus on the Christian message found in the Bible. According to the author, the sole and entire purpose of Christian community fellowship together is the Word of God. Any other activity that is not of Jesus Christ is based on human self and has no place in the Christian community. The message of Bonhoeffer's work can be challenging even to Christians that believe they are God-fearing members of the Church and dedicated to Christ. Pagans and other non-Christians might consider Bonhoeffer's work the result of an unbalanced mind. His willing acceptance of death as a martyr may be evidence for a lack of balance. Only a final judgment that sends him to heaven may demonstrate his balanced mind.



Chapter 3, The Day Alone

Chapter 3, The Day Alone Summary and Analysis

Some individuals may seek the company of others in community from the fear of being alone. Fellowship can be seen as a means of distraction from loneliness. This attempt at distraction can cause separation from others and loneliness. Ironically, the individual can attract to himself what he fears and tries to avoid. Christian community fellowship must not be considered a diversion. Solitude and silence are essential to the individual and to the community. A person in community who fears being alone may harm both himself and the community. However, a person who is not in a community should also be wary of being alone. The call of Jesus Christ to an individual may appear through fellowship with others. Bonhoeffer experiences this call to fellowship while exiled in England. He wants to study pacifism while living alone in India. However, he accepts a call to return to Germany where he leads the illegal seminary community in fellowship.

Rejecting that call by preferring to spend time alone can be harmful as well. Only when one is at ease with fellowship can one be alone. Furthermore, the ability to spend time alone is essential to fellowship. A day in fellowship is helpful only if experienced alone as an individual. Neither solitude nor fellowship can be understood without the other. Similarly, both silence and speech need each other. The Word of God forms and unites fellowship only when experienced in silence. The individual must be silent before receiving the Word if his thoughts are to hear it. He must be silent after hearing the Word of God to understand its continuing message. The ability to avoid talking comes without difficulty in spiritual quiet. Silence enables the power of clarity, purity and focus on the essentials to develop. Similarly, even secular ideas can be stated more clearly with fewer words. Other members in community may be seen in a different way after spending time apart from each other. Silence for its own sake can bring either despair and fear or the false peace of self-deception. Only when silence is used to experience the Word of God directly is it worthwhile according to Bonhoeffer. A Christian in community needs three specific times to be alone in silence every day. The author recommends that community members meditate in quiet alone on scripture and pray and seek intercession.

Meditation is an essential part of community. Personal meditation is necessary for the purposes of devotion to scriptures, private prayer, and intercession. An individual is not lonely during these times. However, the individual does spend this time alone with the Word of God. A short text or verse may be used to meditate on over several days or a week. A particular word or phrase from the Bible may be understood as the Word of God directed to him personally. A long time in meditation may be needed for God's Word to stand out from distracting thoughts. Several periods of meditation on the same verse may be necessary. Personal meditation does not need words to express thought and prayer. There is no need to seek new ideas and insights. Strange or unusual feelings or consciousness while meditating are not a sign of meaning or value. Focusing on God's Word is the goal of personal meditation, and its effects may work in an



individual quietly and over long periods of time. Meditation promises happiness just by seeking God. There is no lasting joy from feeling false expectations of God.

Prayer enables one to be open and willing to hear, accept and act on the Word in one's life. Each person is different with individual tasks, decisions, sins and temptations. Prayer in silence allows one to express these thoughts to God. Thoughts often wander and it is difficult to maintain focus during meditation. Bonhoeffer suggests a calm return to the starting thoughts of meditation when distracted. The author makes a distinction in his teaching on prayer between praying as an individual and praying as a community. Praying as a community uses prearranged, formal words or song from the Bible or other devotional sources. These formal prayers focus community members' attention together on the same sense of the Word. Praying alone, however, has no similar formality. The use of words expected in common prayer can be distracting in personal prayer. Bonhoeffer interprets prayer primarily as a readiness and willingness to receive and use the Word in personal life. Praying alone is not like the common prayer of the assembled community. This prayer in meditation is a much more personal and private communication between the Christian believer and Jesus Christ. In silent and personal prayer there is no need for words. Communication in these periods is direct from the Word of God to an open and willing heart of the person praying. No words are needed in personal prayer as they are in community prayer.

Intercession and personal prayer should both be related to the scriptural passage used in meditation. Members of the Christian fellowship may know others who need their concern and prayer. Their own friends and relatives may ask for prayer and intercession. A suitable time is when the individual member is alone in prayer and meditation. He can make requests for personal intercession then that would be unsuitable for the community. A primary concern in personal intercession is for those in the fellowship that have asked for assistance. Christian fellowship can only survive through intercession of members for each other. The act of making intercession gives each brother a right to stand before Christ and share in His mercy. Intercession on behalf of one another is a service owed daily to God and the brothers in community fellowship. Bonhoeffer claims intercession of community members for each other helps the community grow in understanding and appreciation of its individual members. Praying for one another creates positive feelings and lessens the possibility of tension and struggle in the community.

Praying for intercession enables the members to see each other as sinners. Each of them recognizes that they need the grace and mercy of Christ. Intercession should not be asked in general but very specifically for definite persons and difficulties to be promising. Each Christian in a community has a responsibility to seek intercession for one other. Praying for intercession is not just the responsibility of the pastor. Realization of the need to pray for intercession requires the time of every Christian. Intercession is a daily source of new joy in God and in the Christian community.

Meditation on Scriptures, prayer and intercession is a daily service that offers the grace of God. A regular time and training should be set aside to perform this devotion. Generally, the best time of day for this personal time is early in the morning. It is



important that the members consider they have a right to this time. The community members should follow a regular schedule for orderliness and faithful performance of this service. The time must be undisturbed and done in quiet no matter what else may be going on in the community. The author claims this regular exercise in personal devotion provides an opportunity for the members to show their commitment. A scriptural basis for this claim is the verse that requires a Christian be faithful in small daily things in order to be faithful in great things.

The test of meditation for a Christian may happen many times each day while alone in an non-Christian world. The environment of a workaday world can reveal whether meditation puts one in real contact with the strengthening and purifying power of God. If Christian fellowship is real, the strength received from intercession may last throughout the day. Bonhoeffer claims the everyday world exposes a Christian to the reality of his meditation. If meditation puts him in actual spiritual contact with God, his faith should strengthen. If his faith is stronger, the Christian should be able to rely upon the Word of God to fortify his obedience, love and good works. If a believing Christian is not made stronger by real contact with the Word of God in meditation, his return to everyday life may be fearful.

Every sin in thought, word or deed causes injury to the whole fellowship. Each member can either help or harm the spiritual reality of Christian fellowship. The author uses the metaphor of a sick and infected physical body to illustrate how the spiritual body of the Christian community is affected. The physical body is weakened by sickness that occurs in any of its parts. If a member resists weakening by sin in the day spent alone he returns to Christian fellowship strengthened from his solitude. He receives anew the blessings of fellowship through the Word of God experienced as an individual and in the community of fellowship. Upon his return he is blessed from struggling through the day in solitude and from renewed strength of fellowship. The blessings of successful struggle in solitude through the day alone and strength of fellowship are received through the Word of God.

Bonhoeffer poses an apparent conflict between the Scriptural requirement that Christians live alone throughout the world and community life. Examples of life alone are provided by the apostles, Paul, Timothy and John. Bonhoeffer initially follows the path of exile in his life as well. However, the call he receives while in England encourages him to return from a life alone to community life in Germany. He considers life in community to be a gift of grace from God that is not given to everybody. He resolves the dilemma between the Bible recommendation that Christians disperse through the world and early Christian community life together. He believes his return follows Christ's call to come and die.

Bonhoeffer recognizes that community life together has a dimension of solitude and exile necessary for its strengthening. The requirements and benefits of life together can only be appreciated when reconciled with life apart from community. He confirms this path initially in his own life by exiling himself to England. He avoids conflict and his initial call to live among the enemies of God in Hitler's Germany. However, he accepts the second call he receives and returns to Germany, ironically to live in a community.



Bonhoeffer believes this call from life in exile to community is a gift of God's grace. He adjusts from life alone to life together in the community as a gift of God. He experiences both aspects of life alone and together with God and community. Life in community is a source of grace and communication with the Word of God in scripture. The world that surrounds a community of fellowship proves the value of meditation on the Word of God. The community can support these tests of faith and witness experienced in the everyday world. Life together helps the brothers grow in experience and witness to the Word of God in community and when alone amidst non-Christians. Life alone yet together is a message of the initial chapters. Bonhoeffer now states how they should treat each other.



Chapter 4, Ministry

Chapter 4, Ministry Summary and Analysis

Bonhoeffer develops the Scriptural and spiritual basis for community and devotions of the fellowship in the first three chapters of the work. In this next chapter he discusses the interaction of community members with each other. His objective is a set of rules and advice to direct the members' behavior. Bonhoeffer recommends what the members pay attention to and how they think, feel and interact with one another. Despite his claim that Christian community fellowship is a divine reality, Bonhoeffer is realistic and practical. He recognizes the members need human rules of thought and discipline to support a more distant appeal of divine approval. The early chapters organize daily devotions to support a spiritual foundation for the divine reality. This section proposes interpersonal practices to maintain the functioning organization of a human reality.

The author refers to these rules and recommendations as ministries. Although following rules may be a service to others, changing the name to ministry or service may encourage better obedience by the brothers than rules or laws. Bonhoeffer introduces the need for service to others by the initial reaction when one brother meets another. Ironically, this judgmental first meeting is referenced in a scriptural quote. The verse provides the basis on which to support the first ministry that is a critical element in forming the community.

When meeting another person there is an immediate comparison of oneself to the person just met. These feelings arise even when meeting others to form a Christian community. This judgment can cause discord. Each person may take a strategic position relative to the other that maintains a sense of self-assertion. Christian community members especially may argue among themselves about which of them is the greatest. According to Bonhoeffer even the original apostles in Scripture wondered about their ranking. The habits of self-justifying and judging others are evil traits compared to the good habits of justification by grace and serving others.

The ministry of holding one's tongue or just not saying bad things is the most effective way to fight evil thoughts about another. Never allow the evil thoughts to be said aloud. Bonhoeffer states another absolute rule of every Christian fellowship should be to ban one brother from saying anything secretly about another. This ban includes even good intentions to help another so as to avoid any opportunity for mischief. When members obey this rule from the community's beginning they may see God's creative glory anew. God creates each individual in His own image and unique form. The differences between members of the community are a reason to rejoice and serve. Other members no longer provide opportunities to talk about or judge one's own self-justification when this rule is followed. Each individual in a Christian community is an essential link in a chain. A community fellowship needs weak and strong members to survive and thrive. Neither survives without the other. A Christian community in fellowship endures only



through justification by grace and service to one another. Receiving God's mercy oneself creates a desire to simply serve others.

The ministry of meekness or humility requires that one think highly of others and little of oneself to serve them. A Christian who lives as a result of the forgiveness of sin through Jesus Christ thinks little of self. He believes it is better to serve a neighbor than to get his own way. An individual cannot seek his own personal honor and still serve God and his neighbor. Justification or the freedom from guilt through the grace of God enables one to accept insults and injury without protest. Both insults and injury are seen as coming from God's grace. One must accept one's own immorality and sinfulness without comparison to another. Service to another is not genuine if the other's sin is considered to be worse than one's own. A neighbor needs many other services than just hearing the Word of God. Three additional services identified as ministries include listening, helpfulness and bearing that are owed to one's neighbor as well.

The ministry of listening or paying attention to one another in the fellowship requires one to first listen to what a brother says. Bonhoeffer considers this ministry of listening to be a greater service to another than speaking. Similarly, listening to the Word of God is the beginning of love. If one cannot listen to another patiently and at length he may soon find himself talking but speaking to no one. Patients can be assisted in secular therapy as well by a professional psychologist who listens to them. Christians and non-Christians alike can both benefit from this soul therapy. Christians should listen with ears of God that have the same patience and understanding as God, in order to be able to speak the Word of God.

The ministry of helpfulness or thoughtfulness requires that one offer to each other active helpfulness. The offer of simple assistance in what are often small, petty and trifling acts may take much time. A benefit of this ministry helps the brother learn not to take himself and his own career too seriously. Humility is practiced by being available to help each other no matter how important one thinks his own schedule is. Fellowship of Christian community is a continuing environment where God arranges the schedule of its members. The brethren ought to always be prepared to be interrupted by God through another who needs help in some small matter. Christian community life enables daily helpful tasks done by one another to joyfully proclaim the message of God's love and mercy.

The ministry of bearing or supporting one another is a third service owed to the brethren in community. Non-Christian society does not bear one another. Non-Christians have no reason to help other unrelated persons that may become a burden. A Christian brother is a burden only because he is a Christian. It is a Christian duty to forbear and sustain one's brother in community. Only if another becomes a burden can one truly become a brother and not be considered an object. God bears mankind by maintaining His fellowship with them in faith.

Similarly, Christians must share in the law of Christ that is fulfilled in the cross. The whole life of a Christian consists in bearing or spiritually carrying the cross. Fellowship of the cross requires one to carry the burden of another. The law of Christ is denied



when one refuses to bear the burden of another. The first step toward bearing the burden of another is accepting his freedom. We must accept, affirm and be involved with the reality of another in bearing him joyfully. The members in a fellowship vary in their strength and weakness of faith. Each one needs as much patience as another. The fellowship with God and one's brother is broken in sin. Bearing with another in sin makes the grace of God more evident. The sins of another are more difficult to bear than each other's freedom. By forgiving sin the brethren receives sinners in the fellowship of Jesus Christ. Bearing one another in forgiveness is given daily. Intercession is offered for one another knowing oneself is being borne as well. This strength enables listening, helpfulness and bearing with others to proclaim the ultimate Word of God ministry.

The ministry of proclaiming or making one's faith known publicly includes responsibility to serve one's brother through the judging and separating Word of God. The member in community fellowship who listens, serves and bears one another may be more likely to say nothing. He may not want to be critical of his neighbor. This could be the point at which a desire to dominate could declare itself. Christians living together in community may experience times when they feel compelled to proclaim God's Word to another. The other member is a sinner as well, and needs assistance, encouragement and forgiveness as do all humans. He is seen in crying need of God's grace. Recognizing this fact gives one's dialogue the freedom and candor needed to follow the way Christ bids us. As one learns to allow others to speak the Word, he accepts severe reproaches and admonitions humbly and gratefully. He can then speak more freely with others. By humbly renouncing one's own abilities, God's redeeming help to another is enabled. The Word of God is thereby free to save a brother through us.

The ministry of authority or the power to influence others in the fellowship depends on brotherly service. Only when the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is offered can there be genuine spiritual authority. It is Jesus Christ acting in man where there is nothing in the man himself to admire. The Church places confidence in a simple servant of the Word of Jesus because he is guided by Word of the Good Shepherd. A simple and accepting servant allows Jesus Christ to guide without interference of his human insight and conceit. Only a servant of Jesus without power is willing to humbly submit himself to the authority of the Word. Only the brother that foregoes his human authority lets the power of Jesus Christ act through him in a Christian fellowship community.



Chapter 5, Confession and Communion

Chapter 5, Confession and Communion Summary and Analysis

In addition to the human organization of community rules, Bonhoeffer makes another compromise with the humanity of divine reality that community in Christ is. There are occasions in which a brother will fall short of obedience to the rules or performance of the ministries. When a brother makes a mistake as humans regularly do he needs some way to restore himself to community. The need of forgiveness from God is recognized in scripture but humans need evidence from the community as well. Support for a brother's return to fellowship is provided because sin has negative effects on both the brother and community. Throughout this section Bonhoeffer uses the expression "breaking through" to describe the sinner moving forward to another level of community understanding.

An act of sin makes the sinner feel alone. The sinner is not able to break through to the fellowship with one another as a devout believer. The sinner is no longer devout and is unable to experience fellowship. God saves all sinners that include everyone. There is no need to pretend that one is not a sinner in the community. Christ becomes man so all mankind can believe in him as Brother. He brings the love of God to sinners. Jesus Christ gives his followers the authority in his name to hear confession of sins and forgive sinners. By delegating that authority He makes a blessing of all brothers in the Church. A brother becomes Christ in a spiritual sense when he hears the confession of sins. Christ bestows on brothers in Christ the power and authority to hear and forgive sins in His name. Confessing to another brother is in effect the same as confessing to God through the authority he receives in Jesus Christ.

Breaking through to community or reestablishing the communication with fellowship is realized by confessing sin. Confessing sin to a brother enables the break-through anew to fellowship of the community. A man in sin is alone and separated from the community; a sinner wants to remain unknown and hidden from the light. The darkness one feels while in sin poisons and isolates a sinner's heart and soul from his brethren. Confession brings the gospel of light back through the darkness and exposes sin to light. Sin that is hidden separates one from fellowship and makes the community counterfeit. Confessing sin renews the unity of true fellowship in Jesus Christ. Fellowship can be restored by confession to an individual brother acting on the authority of Jesus Christ. The brother confessor is authorized to exercise power for the congregation. Confession of sin need not be made individually to each brother.

Breaking through or reaching out to an understanding of the cross is accomplished by confessing sin. The sinner is able to break-through to the cross that destroys the human pride at its root. A selfish individual wants to be his own law. Each man thinks he has a right to his own self with its hatred, desires, life and death. Man's desire to be his own god makes him wicked. Confessing sin to another brother is humiliating. A sinner cannot be full of pride when confessing his sins to a brother. A prideful man tries to stay away



from the humiliation of confessing sin. Jesus Christ endures the shameful public death of a sinner on the cross. His crucifixion and death on the cross destroys all human pride. By confessing sins to a brother the sinner is able to break-through or reestablish contact with the true fellowship of the cross with Christ. Jesus Christ conquers the old man of pride in salvation. The new man shares in resurrection of Christ and eternal life.

Breaking through to new life is accomplished by confessing sin. The sinner is able to break through to new life. Confession of sin enables conversion to a new beginning in Christ. The confessing Christian gives up the old prideful man by forsaking his sin. Like the disciples that give up all when Christ calls them to follow Him, the repentant sinner gives up sin and follows Christ. The power of sin is broken initially in baptism and renewed again when confessing sin. Confessing sinners are taken out of the darkness of sin and brought into the kingdom of Jesus Christ. By confessing, the joy of baptism is renewed in a new life.

Breaking through to certainty is accomplished by confessing sin to another brother. One cannot break-through to certainty when confessing sins to an unseen God. It is easier to confess to an unseen God than a sinful brother that is seen daily. It is easier to deceive oneself that sin is forgiven by confessing to God. Continual setbacks and weak Christian obedience are reasons to depend on self-forgiveness. A complete break with sin, however, requires the judging and pardoning Word of God. The dependence on self-deception can be broken by confessing to a brother. God gives this break-through to certainty by His Presence when one brother confesses his sin to another brother. Sin is mercifully brought into the light when confessing to a brother. Divine forgiveness is certain when spoken by a brother in the name of God. Certainty of forgiveness requires confession of specific sins. One must ask forgiveness and examine oneself on the Ten Commandments. The sinner asks forgiveness of all sins known or unknown. Confession offers divine help.

Despite the scriptural claim that any brother can hear another's confession, the human dimension of the divine reality requires consideration in the analysis of Bonhoeffer's work. He provides general guidelines to support the selection process of a community confessor. The confessor should be able to ease the practical implications of breaking through to community after sin. It is only realistic to find a brother confessor that is at least able to understand the needs of the community. Ironically, only a brother grounded in life's practical realities may relate to the spiritual facts of sin and forgiveness.

The subsection titled to whom to confess claims that Jesus promises every brother may hear another's confession. However, not all brothers understand equally well. A brother who knows the weakness of the human heart and the grace and mercy of forgiveness under the cross of Jesus may better understand another's confession of sin. Christ's experience on the cross demonstrates how sin destroys man. Only God's forgiveness of sin heals man. Human understanding alone cannot satisfy man's yearning for God's forgiveness. The cross of Christ that a Christian lives daily prevents him from being judgmental or lenient when hearing confession. Brotherly confession is most effective if divine severity and divine love are experienced daily.



There are two dangers present in hearing the confession of brothers. The confessor may become so busy that confession becomes routine. He may begin to spiritually dominate the others. He ought to experience himself the humiliation of confessing to another so he can hear the confession of others without harming them. Another danger in confession is that the one confessing sin to another must not be too pious or too routine. Forgiveness of sin alone is the purpose and goal of confession.

The joyful sacrament of confession in the name of Christ is a complete action in itself. However, it also benefits the Christian community preparing to receive Holy Communion together. Christ states in Scripture that a brother should receive the Lord's Supper only if reconciled to his brother. The Christian brethren assemble together the day before to beg forgiveness of each other. They confess any anger, strife, envy, evil gossip, and other unbrotherly conduct committed. The individual may desire to be certain that particular sins are forgiven. The confession and absolution by a brother confessor provides that assurance through Christ. Preparation on the day before the Lord's Supper is filled with brotherly admonition and encouragement, prayers and joy.

The day of the Lord's Supper offers an even greater opportunity of joy for the Christian community. The fellowship receives forgiveness, new life and salvation in the body and blood of Jesus Christ. The Lord's Supper is an ultimate fulfillment of Christ's fellowship at table. The community reaches its goal of joy in Christ. The life of Christians together under the Word reaches perfection in the joyful sacrament of confession and communion of the Lord's Supper. This occasion is the fullness of Christian fellowship in community.



Characters

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Jesus Christ

Heinrich Himmler

Christian

Nazi

Hitler

John the Apocalyptist

Paul and Timothy

Abraham, Jacob, Moses and Joshua

God, Lord and Creator, Father, Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior, Holy Spirit

Non-Christian

Martin Luther



Objects/Places

Flossenburg concentration camp

Flossenburg concentration camp is a Nazi detention center in Flossenburg, Germany. Bonhoeffer is executed there in 1945 by hanging.

Berlin, Germany

Berlin, Germany is the birthplace of Bonhoeffer and his seven brothers and sisters. He returns to Berlin where he lectures, writes his first book and serves as pastor to students in a technical school. Bonhoeffer gives a radio broadcast there in 1933 and criticizes Hitler as a leader who misleads the German people.

Union Theological Seminary

Union Theological Seminary is a seminary in New York that Bonhoeffer attends in 1930. He learns about Niebuhr and American Negro spirituals there.

Finkenwalde, Germany

Finkenwalde, Germany is the German town where the illegal, secret seminary Bonhoeffer becomes the leader of in 1935 is located. He writes *Life Together* in Finkenwalde in the original German in 1938. The seminary is subsequently shut down by the Gestapo.

The Body of Christ

The Body of Christ is a metaphor for the term of faith that refers to the belief in a spiritual reality of Christ on earth. When the Son of God becomes man He takes on human nature. From then on Christians belong to Christ for all eternity. Christians are united in Him invisibly and spiritually as the Body of Christ.

The Church

The Church is a metaphor for the term of faith that refers to the belief in a spiritual reality of the assembly of believers in Christ. The Church is not a physical building. However, there are many physical churches that profess membership in The Church. The Church does not refer to a visible assembly of Christian believers. Similarly however, there are many visible assemblies of Christian believers that profess membership in The Church.



Word of God

The Word of God is a metaphor for the term of faith that refers to both the scripture and the Son of God, Jesus Christ.

The Cross

The cross is the term of faith used to describe an historical tool of torture and death used to crucify Jesus Christ. A cross is a wooden upright post with a crossbar. A victim of crucifixion is nailed to the cross and left to hang on it until dead. The Roman state in the time of Christ punishes criminals and other enemies of the state this way. Crucifixion on a cross makes an example of the enemies of the state since it is a particularly humiliating and painful death. Crucifixion of Jesus Christ on the cross is the method that the Son of God uses to atone for the sins of mankind. His obedience even unto death on the cross and resurrection from the grave after death provides salvation for mankind.

Holy Scripture

Holy Scripture is the Word of God. It is a term that also refers to the Holy Bible, which is an organized collection of texts written and gathered through the ages. The books are writings of man but authored by God, according to believers. The scriptures are God's revealing Word. Content of the books is interrelated and connected. It is separated into the Old Testament before Christ's birth and the New Testament after Christ's birth. The books contain God's Word on the subjects of promise and fulfillment, sacrifice and law, law and gospel, cross and resurrection, faith and obedience, and having and hoping. The Bible provides a full witness to Jesus Christ the Lord. Holy Scripture is comprised of the Old and New Testament books including the Psalms, gospels and epistles.

Old Testament

The Old Testament is a division of Holy Scripture comprised of a collection of writings by and about Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Joshua and other men of God. The Old Testament includes books and psalms of the Bible that are written before Christ was born.

New Testament

The New Testament is a division of Holy Scripture comprised of a collection of writings by Paul, Timothy and other apostles. The imprisoned apostle Paul longs to see Timothy in the last days of his life. The New Testament includes gospels, epistles and writing of the Bible written about or after Christ is born.

Psalter

The Psalter or Book of Psalms is a division of Holy Scripture comprised of a collection of psalms arranged for devotional use. Bonhoeffer reveals the secret of the Psalter to be the point in faith that a Christian believer comes into spiritual unity with other believers from different times and places. The author interprets the Psalter as the common prayer of the Church. When a community of fellowship prays the Psalter it is united with the spiritual Body of Christ that transcends all time and place. The individual who is praying from the Psalter may not relate the psalm to his personal experience. However, the secret of the Psalter unites him in an invisible and spiritual way with all believers throughout the ages.



Themes

Jesus Christ as Central Focus

The all-encompassing theme of Bonhoeffer's work is that Jesus Christ is the central focus and purpose of life on earth. This is a difficult message to believe and accept. It is even more challenging to live by this belief in daily life. Bonhoeffer commits himself to this belief by claiming the call of Christ is to come and die. Accepting this belief demands an absolute denial of human ego and pride. Morality is wholly foreign and unachievable to mankind without Jesus Christ. Christians seek salvation, deliverance and justification in Christ. His death and resurrection is the only vital thing for the salvation of mankind.

The Son of God becomes man and takes on human nature as Jesus Christ. Because the Son of God is Jesus Christ, human nature is united in His incarnation, on the cross and in His resurrection. Christ endures for mankind the shameful public death of a sinner. His crucifixion and death on the cross destroys human pride. Redemption, righteousness, innocence and blessedness are received by Christian believers only in and through Jesus Christ. His resurrection from the dead is the singular event that gives mankind new life, hope and salvation. Because of that act mankind may share in the resurrection of Christ and eternal life. On that day the risen Christ defeats death and sin. The fact that Jesus Christ as man rises from the dead is the only reason for hope that Christian believers may be raised on the Last Day as well. Christians pray from the innocence of Christ given by grace in faith. Only prayer offered through and in Jesus Christ promises fulfillment.

Christ mediates the way to God and each other in community. The most direct way to Christian fellowship is through the mediation of Christ. Christian community fellowship is based solely upon Jesus Christ. Christian fellowship acknowledges that the whole world is maintained by God for Jesus Christ in His Word and message. All earthly gifts to the world are given only for the sake of Christ. It is not man's work that provides daily bread. The bread is God's free and gracious gift of grace. When the Son of God takes on human nature as Jesus Christ He becomes our Brother. His obedience even unto death as Jesus Christ in the sinful nature of man redeems all mankind from damnation. He brings the love of God the Father to sinful mankind. Spiritual love is shared with each other for Christ's sake. The more that Christian believers become aware salvation comes from Jesus Christ, the more peaceful may be their acceptance of the belief that Jesus Christ is the central focus and purpose of life on earth.

Christian Community is Divine Reality not an Ideal

Another theme of Bonhoeffer's work is that Christian community is a Divine Reality. Communities formed by man generally set out a mission and goals they intend to reach. The proposed goal of a Christian community fellowship like a seminary might be joining



together in union with Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer claims that this goal is irrelevant since Christian community in Jesus Christ is a Divine Reality when the community forms. The theme is hard to understand because divine reality is both spiritual and invisible. The theme cannot be proven by logic or seen in fact; it can only be accepted in faith. The author supports this theme by reference to his understanding of relevant scripture.

Human communities dissolve if based on a wish or dream as an ideal. Human emotions and community goals change easily and are unstable. Feelings can become disheartened and the community may collapse. Human intentions may be well-meaning but sincerity is not relevant. Dreamers and idealists make demands on and develop expectations for the others in society. Demands may be unrealistic and result in accusation and failure. Human disillusionment makes the fellowship of God appreciated. Christian community fellowship with weakness and failure is more worthy of thankfulness than complaint. Pastors and zealous members of a congregation should in particular not complain to or about the congregation God gives them. Community is a gift from God for which they should be thankful. God creates the divine reality in Christ for believers to share. The community basis and strength is in Jesus Christ.

The theme of Christian brotherhood as divine not ideal reality reaffirms the prior theme that Jesus Christ is the central focus and purpose of life on earth. When the Son of God becomes man and takes on human nature, mankind is taken spiritually into union with Christ. Believers accept as fact that Christian brotherhood is a reality only in and through Jesus Christ. When Christ takes on human nature mankind is in Him wherever He is and forever. The growth in Christian fellowship depends on the action of Christ. Bonhoeffer claims Christian community is not a goal for members to achieve. When the Son of God takes human nature in Jesus Christ the community fellowship in Christ becomes a divine reality. The community participates automatically in the Divine Reality of Jesus Christ.

Christian Community is Spiritual not Human Reality

Another related theme in Christian community is that it is a spiritual not a human reality. A spiritual community is different from any other type of community. The Bible refers to creations of the Holy Spirit as *spiritual*. Scripture also names the natural urges, powers and other capacities of the human spirit as *human*. According to Bonhoeffer, Scripture claims that the Holy Spirit puts Jesus Christ as Lord and Savior in our hearts. To further explain, Bonhoeffer proposes other characteristics of spiritual and human reality that he compares. Spiritual community is based on truth compared to a basis of desire in human community. The essence of spiritual community is light compared to darkness in human community. The fellowship of spiritual community forms with brethren called by Christ compared to those comprised of devout souls in human community. Love is expressed in spiritual community through brotherly service but the human love of good and evil desire is shown in human community. The Word of God alone rules and obligates in a spiritual community but the Word of God and man both can rule and obligate man in a human community. Members of spiritual community surrender power,

honor and influence to the Holy Spirit. Members of a human community seek power, honor and influence.

The immediacy of human reality illustrates a stark contrast between spiritual and human community. Human desire for community needs contact or connection of one to another. Human desire for contact with one another can be as strong as the urge of physical flesh to merge with another. The nearness of one another in human community enables one member to influence others or the whole community. Weak individuals can be absorbed or influenced by a stronger individual. A stronger individual can overpower a weaker member to persuade the weaker member and thereby block the Holy Spirit's influence.

Similarly, human love focuses on another individual for his or her own sake and wants direct contact. Spiritual love is given to another for Christ's sake. Human love depends on one another. Truth is less important than the beloved. Human love differs from spiritual love in two ways. Human love cannot accept loss of a false beloved for the sake of a genuine fellowship. Similarly, human love is unable to love an enemy that resists it. Human love comes from desire. Unfulfilled or frustrated desire becomes hatred. Human love seeks itself as the goal. Human love serves itself and cannot serve another selflessly.

Spiritual love originates in Jesus Christ and serves him alone. Spiritual love does not desire but only serves. Human love does not serve but only desires another and is unable to understand spiritual love that loves an enemy as a brother. Spiritual love does not desire or come from another but from Jesus Christ and his Word. It does not need to be physically near human community to make another in one's image like human love does. Spiritual love accepts another's image received from Christ. Spiritual love allows another the freedom to be alone with the Word of God and makes no attempt to influence others.

The direct way to others is through Christ's mediation. A Christian community thrives or dies to the extent it is not a movement but a part of one Christian Church. A newly-forming spiritual community may be at risk of mixing human and spiritual senses. A short retreat may cause feelings of fellowship that are distracting to brotherly Christian fellowship through faith in Jesus Christ rather than human feelings.

Style

Perspective

Bonhoeffer's *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* is told in the first person plural "we" from the community's point of view. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is the director of a community of seminarians. He is educated as a Protestant theologian and pastor. Although Bonhoeffer writes in the first person plural, content of the narrative is clearly that of the community leader. He writes to inform the community brethren about spiritual and moral issues. The author is a Christian pastor who is committed personally and in his teaching to follow the call of Jesus Christ. Bonhoeffer's perspective is that of a theologian writing a moral treatise. He is not a storyteller of tales, actions and events in seminary life. The author writes for seminarians and others who may want to believe in and follow the Christian principles and way of life he describes and is committed to.

Written in 1938, Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* takes place in the illegal and secret seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany. This seminary is an essential part of his background that includes studies in Berlin and Tübingen. Self-imposed exile in London to avoid the Nazis and later imprisonment in a concentration camp where he is hanged are his experiences living alone. Bonhoeffer's return from London begins his life together in Christian community fellowship. Prison and martyrdom end it. The physical conditions and locations of his life are irrelevant to the author's discussion of life together. There is no description of any physical reality, dimension or perception. Bonhoeffer's physical environment whether hot, cold, pleasant or painful simply does not matter. The only thing that matters to him is faith in the Word of God that promises heavenly peace in spiritual reality. Physical reality is spiritualized. Whatever physical cares or pleasures anticipated or experienced are seen in relationship to presumed pain or happiness of heaven or hell. In that context, the physical reality of life on earth is apparently not worth consideration by the mystical Bonhoeffer.

Tone

The tone or mood of *Life Together* is a subjective expression of the spiritual reality that the author believes is objective. Bonhoeffer's use of the first person plural agrees with his fundamental religious position that community fellowship thrives only through Jesus Christ. There are no purely human individuals described or acting in this work. Life together in the seminary that Bonhoeffer leads is about living in Christian community of fellowship according to the rules and beliefs stated in scripture. Neither Bonhoeffer nor any members of the religious community has a personal identity with which to have a subjective view. The only reality Bonhoeffer accepts is Christ and the triune Godhead.

The work is difficult to understand. Whether or not the reader is a Christian believer or familiar with Scripture, Bonhoeffer's meaning is clearly stated. In both his writing and his



life Bonhoeffer means what he states, "Christ's call is to come and die." The book is about dying to the visible, human and physical world that is seen and felt. The meaning of Bonhoeffer's expression is his commitment to the invisible, divine and spiritual world neither seen nor felt but believed in faith. The author's martyrdom proves the integrity of his meaning. He means to follow Christ's call to come and die in his own life. His death by hanging confirms the strength of his faith. His meaning is made clear in martyrdom. His readers may decide whether or not to accept his witness as their reality in faith.

Structure

The one-hundred and twenty-two pages of *Life Together: The Classic Exploration of Faith in Community* are divided into an introduction and five chapters with no appendix. Each chapter has titled subsections. Chapter details have between three and eight subsections. The introduction is seven pages long but has no titled subsections. Subsequent chapter lengths range from thirteen to thirty-six pages. Subsections have subtitles that refer to the topics explained within the subsection. The number of pages in each subsection varies with the amount of detail required for the author to provide specific information about the subtitle subject. Some subsections are one-half page while other subsection thought runs for several pages in length.

Bonhoeffer writes the manuscript in his native German language. The book is translated into English from the German. Bonhoeffer's German expression appears to be more detailed and precisely structured than the English text. Consequently the translation may seem unnatural if compared to the more casual English. For example, a forty-four-word sentence with four commas may not be unusual in the German text. However, a lengthy sentence in English translation becomes confusing and difficult to understand. When combined with the theological, philosophical and mystical content of the work, text and structure seem awkward. English text and content do not flow smoothly together.

Most chapters begin with a short overview of the chapter title content and meaning. This summary introduces issues that the subsections provide more detail to support. The end of a subsection is regularly indicated. Words used in the last subsection paragraph often become the title or topic of the following subsection. This technique enables the author to identify the connection from one topic to the next topic. Poetic and prayerful stanzas from various sources are occasionally interspersed. Scriptural verses are quoted freely with specific references to book, chapter and verse cited. The scriptural verses quoted in the text generally provide support for the theory or practice being recommended in the following section. For example, the first line of the opening chapter quotes a verse from a Psalm about how pleasant it is for brethren to live together. Community is the name and subject matter of the opening chapter.

Quotes

"In the gray dawn of an April day in 1945, in the concentration camp at Flossenburg, shortly before it was liberated by the allied forces, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was liberated by special order of Heinrich Himmler." Introduction, pg. 7

"Christian community means community through and in Jesus Christ. On this presupposition rests everything that the Scriptures provide in the way of directions and precepts for the communal life of Christians." Chapter I, pg. 24

"Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate." Chapter I, pg. 30

"For Christians the beginning of the day should not be burdened and oppressed with besetting concerns for the day's work. At the threshold of the new day stands the Lord who made it. All the darkness and distraction of the dreams of night retreat before the clear light of Jesus Christ and his Wakening Word." Chapter II, pg. 43

"As a whole the Scriptures are God's revealing Word. Only in the infiniteness of its inner relationships, in the connection of Old and New Testaments, of promise and fulfillment, sacrifice and law, law and gospel, cross and resurrection, faith and obedience, having and hoping, will the full witness to Jesus Christ the Lord be perceived. This is why common devotions will include, besides the prayer of the psalms, a longer reading from the Old and the New Testament." Chapter II, pg. 51

"Prayer means nothing else but the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, and, what is more, to accept it in one's personal situation, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations." Chapter III, pg. 85

"To make intercession means to grant our brother the same right that we have received, namely, to stand before Christ and share in his mercy." Chapter III, pg. 86

"Every day brings to the Christian many hours in which he will be alone in an unchristian environment. These are the times of *testing*." Chapter III, pg. 88

"Often we combat our evil thoughts most effectively if we absolutely refuse to allow them to be expressed in words." Chapter IV, pg. 91

"The second service that one should perform for another in a Christian community is that of active helpfulness. This means, initially, simple assistance in trifling, external matters." Chapter IV, pg. 99

"To bear the burden of the other person means involvement with the created reality of the other, to accept and affirm it, and, in bearing with it, to break through to the point where we take joy in it." Chapter IV, pg. 101



"Where Christians live together the time must inevitably come when in some crisis one person will have to declare God's Word and will to another." Chapter IV, pg. 105

"In confession the break-through to community takes place. Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community." Chapter V, pg 112

"In confession the break-through to new life occurs." Chapter V, pg. 115

"It is not experience of life but experience of the Cross that makes one a worthy hearer of confessions." Chapter V, pg. 118

"The forgiveness of sins is the sole ground and goal of confession." Chapter V, pg. 120



Topics for Discussion

Discuss the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer as described by the translator's comments in the Introduction to *Life Together*.

Compare and contrast the concept of spiritual and human reality as expressed by Bonhoeffer.

How does Bonhoeffer consider human reality in relation to the Christian community in fellowship?

Discuss how the Psalter differs from the Old and New Testament in Scripture?

Describe elements of a day in the Christian community described by Bonhoeffer. How do these elements compare to those of a day in what might be a normal secular community.

What are the elements of Bonhoeffer's understanding of meditation?

Describe the types of ministries Bonhoeffer claims a Christian is expected to perform.

Discuss Bonhoeffer's idea of *break-through* that is provided through confession.

Describe how Bonhoeffer presents and discusses the *joyful sacrament*.