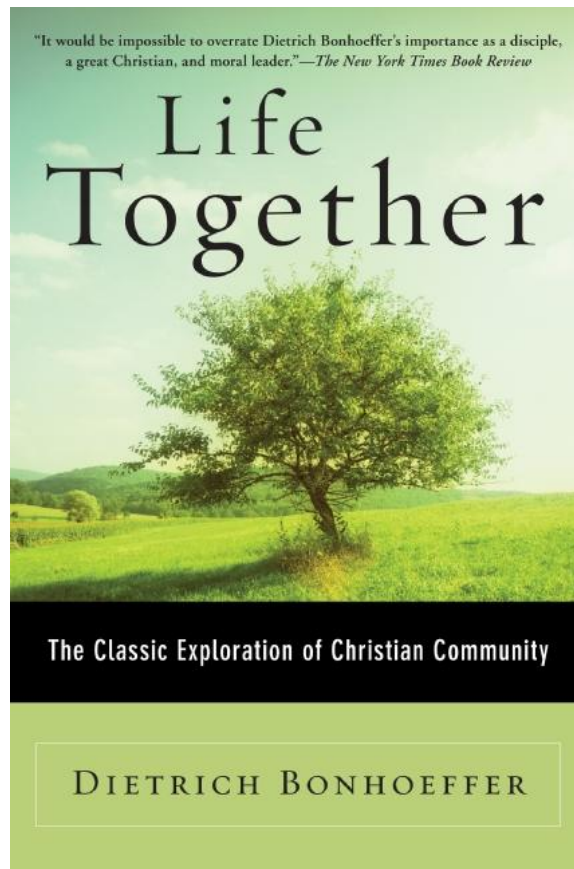


Living Love(d) Together Bible Study

Based on Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Leader's Guide



LIVE LOVE(D)

Living Love(d) Together

Neither love, nor living love, nor living loved, is possible in isolation. By definition, love involves life with more than one person. It begins with God's love for us in Christ. Love that was shown on a cross. Love that was confirmed by an empty tomb. Love that gives us forgiveness and life and salvation to all who repent and believe in Jesus. As Christians, we live constantly loved by God in Christ. This love unites us to all Christians of all times and places.

Live Love(d) is not just a catchy theme for a National Youth Gathering. It involves relationships and communication with others. It involves shared joys and sorrows and struggles. Because we are all sinful, it also involves regular confession and forgiveness. This basic truth is the foundation for this pre-Gathering Bible study. Based on an important little book called *Life Together*, it examines what it means to live together as sinners who have been loved and forgiven by God in Christ.

The concept for this study is simple. Each group coming to the National Youth Gathering is coming *as a group*. This means that *Live Love(d)* begins with the relationships that already exist in your congregation's youth group. This study explores various aspects of these relationships. It is designed to help the youth (and Adult Leaders) understand the communal nature of Christianity. In this way, it will serve them at the Gathering as well as throughout their lives as members of the body of Christ.

While it is not absolutely necessary, it is recommended that the leader of this study read *Life Together* along with the study (or even better, before the study begins). It is only 122 pages long, and can be purchased from Amazon for just a few bucks. (Be aware that the first chapter is kind of challenging and abstract. If you do not often read theological books, it might be a little intimidating at first. But stick with it! It becomes more readable as the book progresses.)

The book consists of five chapters. In a corresponding way, this study consists of five parts (in addition to an optional introductory study). Each study explores issues raised in the corresponding chapter of the book. Studies may be done in succession, or you might choose several of them to do in any order. If the leader reads the book alongside leading the study, he or she may find more ideas or quotes to enhance the group's study. (Each study will include page number references to the book for the leader.)

We have included a sixth study which might be used as an introductory study. It is based on Bonhoeffer's own life and ministry—which is both fascinating and inspiring in its own right. Even if you choose not to use this study with your youth, it is worth reading through as an Adult Leader on your own. Bonhoeffer was a brilliant scholar and Lutheran pastor in Nazi Germany who ran an underground seminary and participated in a plot to assassinate Hitler. After being caught, he spent a year and a half in a concentration camp before being executed just days before the camp was liberated by American forces. The purpose of this introductory study is to help expand the participants' appreciation for what Bonhoeffer wrote. It will also help youth consider their own calling to serve the Lord in a hostile world.

May God bless you and your youth as you learn and grow in Christ!

Living Love(d) Together

Introducing a Man who Lived Love(d)

Leader's notes are in italics.

The purpose of this introductory study is to introduce the participants to Dietrich Bonhoeffer, an influential Lutheran pastor and author. His story, as you will see below, is an inspiring account of Christian witness and martyrdom—of living love(d) by God in Christ. (Much of the account below is taken from the introduction to Life Together, 7-13).

Begin by reading the entire article together as a group. Make sure you have read through it ahead of time. If appropriate, divide up the readings so that youth can participate. The questions that follow the article are based on quotes and related Scripture passages. They are meant to help the students think about their own Christian faith and life.

Some of the quotes to discuss in this article contain bigger words that might need to be unpacked, especially for younger youth. Be sure you read it ahead of time, and prepare to explain words that may be unfamiliar.



Introduction: The Life and Death of Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was born February 4, 1906 in Breslau, Germany. He grew up mostly in Berlin, where his father was a noted physician and psychiatrist. Dietrich was a baptized and believing Christian. But this was not just a formality. For Dietrich, Christianity could never be mere intellectual theory, doctrine divorced from life, or mystical emotion, but always must be responsible, obedient action, the discipleship of Christ in every situation of concrete everyday life. Doctrine and the Christian life were one and the same. Bonhoeffer demonstrates for us the reality that the Christian faith is a confessing faith, one which teaches and proclaims the gifts of Christ and one which speaks forth through the mouth of Christians by the grace of God in the Holy Spirit. Bonhoeffer's story is significant because he lived in Germany during the reign of the Nazi regime under Adolf Hitler. As he confessed his faith through word and deed, he was put in prison and eventually put to death. He understood that this might happen to him early on. Six years before he was arrested by the Nazi's he had written, "When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die."

Bonhoeffer was an athletic child born into a tight knit family. At the age of 16, he knew he wanted to study theology. He was an avid student. You might even call him brilliant. He had a profound insight on Lutheran theology and the Bible, especially well-known teachings as law and gospel and the theology of the cross. At the age of 21, he received his doctorate with honors in 1927 at the University of Berlin. He understood the profound truth that, to be a Christian is to be part of the body of Christ. He said this: "The Church is Christ existing as community."

These were tumultuous times in Germany. Hitler's rise to power had been rapidly increasing every year since 1923. In 1933, Hitler was appointed Chancellor of Germany. This caused great struggle for the Christian churches of Germany. Eventually they were forced to submit to Nazi policies—many of which were in direct opposition to faithful Christian living. In reaction to this, a number of churches came together in 1933 to form the "Confessing Church" which refused to cave in to Hitler. The Confessing Church became an active voice against the Nazi regime.

In February of 1933, Bonhoeffer delivered a lecture over public radio in which he criticized the German public for seeking a leader which would become a misleader. His radio program was cut off before he could finish. He fled to London, refusing to be a part of the German-Christian compromise with Hitler.

In spring of 1935, he was called by the Confessing Church to take charge of an illegal underground seminary in Germany. He accepted the call and became the primary teacher for 25 young men studying to be pastors. This was life together, the life of the Christian community which is described and documented in *Life Together* (1938). This work,

along with another well-known book he wrote called *The Cost of Discipleship*, help us understand what it means to live as a Christian community.

After he wrote these books and several others about the Bible, the Nazi's closed the underground seminary and forbade Bonhoeffer from writing or publishing his books. By this time, he was already involved in a resistance movement which was planning an attempt to assassinate Hitler. He was in the U.S. for a short stay and returned in 1939 even more committed to the Confessing Church and the resistance work. He saw a lack of response from so many Christian people in Germany as an irresponsible cowardice and a flight from reality. He once said, "The sin of respectable people reveals itself in the flight from responsibility." He believed that a Christian must accept his responsibility as a citizen of this world where God has placed him.

On April 5, 1943, Bonhoeffer, his sister, and brother-in-law were arrested and imprisoned in a military prison and held there until October of 1944. During his imprisonment, he spent time in several concentration camps, including Buchenwald, Schönberg and finally Flossenburg. (An estimated 73,000 victims were put to death at Flossenburg and its sub-camps.) On April 9, 1945, Dietrich Bonhoeffer was executed by hanging. The day before his execution he preached about Jesus' death and resurrection to his fellow inmates. His text was Isaiah 53: "By His stripes we are healed." Before he was taken by the guards, he said to one of the men in his company, "This is the end, but for me it is the beginning of life." Fourteen days later, on April 23, 1945 the 2nd U.S. Cavalry liberated the camp in which he had died.

Through his written works, Dietrich Bonhoeffer continues to be one of the most influential Lutheran theologians of the 20th century and a modern witness for the faith in the midst of persecution and wickedness. Imprisoned for his faith, he would no doubt agree with St. Paul who said, "I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the Gospel, so that it has become known throughout the whole imperial guard and to the rest that my imprisonment is for Christ. And most of the brothers, having become confident in the Lord by my imprisonment, are much more bold to speak the Word of God without fear" (Philippians 1:12-14).

From the Reading...

#1: "For him, Christianity could never be mere intellectual theory, doctrine divorced from life, or mystical emotion, but always must be responsible, obedient action, the discipleship of Christ in every situation of concrete everyday life."

The phrases "divorced from life" and "mystical emotion" may be a little hard for younger youth to understand. Be prepared to paraphrase these phrases. You might also make sure youth understand that the word "doctrine" means "teaching."

In what ways are you tempted to keep your faith and life separate?

What is a concrete example of a time in your life when your faith in Christ led you to "responsible, obedient action"?

#2: "The sin of respectable people reveals itself in the flight from responsibility."

What makes someone "respectable"?

Do you consider yourself a "respectable" person?

In what ways have you avoided responsibility at school? With your friends? In your family?

#3: As he was taken away to be executed, Bonhoeffer said, “This is the end. But for me it is the beginning of life.”

What did he mean by that?

He was looking forward to eternal life in Christ.

How does that kind of perspective shape the way you deal with suffering?

We know there is life after death! 1 Peter 5:10 is also a helpful passage here.

From the Scriptures...

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

What does Peter tell us in these verses about suffering as Christians?

Allow the students to highlight parts of this text. The following questions get at specific parts of the reading.

Often times we, as Christians, expect that we will not have to suffer for our faith. Why are we surprised when persecution comes into our lives as Christians?

We do not understand, or do not take seriously, the devastating affect that sin has on the world. The sinful world is so broken that it killed the Son of God himself. Because we are united to Christ in our baptism, we should expect to suffer as he suffered. See verse 12-13. See also John 15:18-25.

How should we respond to suffering as Christians?

Verse 19. Trust in our faithful God and continue to do good.

How does being part of a community—the community of believers called the church—help us deal with suffering?

We are reminded that we are not the only ones who suffer. See also 1 Peter 5:9.

We support and encourage each other in our suffering. See also 1 Corinthians 12:26.

Prayer

Lord Jesus Christ, before whom all in heaven and earth shall bow, grant courage that our children may confess Your saving name in the face of any opposition from a world hostile to the Gospel. Help us to remember Your faithful people who sacrificed much and even faced death rather than dishonor You when called upon to deny the faith. By Your Spirit, strengthen us to be faithful and to confess boldly, knowing that You will confess Your own before the Father in heaven, with whom You and the Holy Spirit live and reign, one God, now and forever. Amen.

(Collect for Persecuted Christians, LSB)

Living Love(d) Together

Part 1: Community

Leader's notes are in italics.

Getting Started

In 60 seconds, list every group of people you belong to.

Ask them to share their lists, and if necessary, help them add to their list. Possibilities include: sports teams, dance squads, choirs, bands, families, congregations, online groups, unofficial groups of friends, neighborhoods, places of work, etc.

The purpose of this question is to help participants begin to think about the various communities they are part of.

Imagine you did not know a single person who shared your Christian faith. How would that affect your relationship with God?

Give them a little time to think about this. It might be hard to imagine.

The purpose of this question is to help them begin to see connections between their relationship with God and their relationships with other Christians.

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question:

"It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians."

This is a quote from Life Together, page 17.

From your perspective, is it a privilege to belong to a community of Christians?

Why or why not?

To the Scriptures

In the following passages, we learn that Jesus' suffering, death, and resurrection not only earn forgiveness for our sins and the gift of eternal life, but it also unites us to all baptized and believing Christians of all time. Our faith as baptized and believing Christians is not just between us and God! After reading each passage, finish the following sentences in light of what you read.

In these passages, youth will have the opportunity to put into their own words what they hear from the Scriptures. Encourage them to use the text to help them shape their responses. The leader responses below provide some guidance for you, but wait until they have had a chance to struggle with the sentence before giving them the "right" answer. It is recommended that you read through all the questions and try to answer them before you do the study with the youth.

These three passages were chosen on the basis of the three points Bonhoeffer made on p. 21 of Life Together, where he writes: "Christianity means community through Jesus and in Jesus Christ... What does this mean? It means, first, that a Christian needs others because of Jesus Christ. It means, second, that Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. It means, third, that in Jesus Christ we have been chosen from eternity, accepted in time, and united for eternity."

If your group is big you may want to break them into smaller groups to complete this part of the study.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

Finish this sentence: Christians need other Christians because...

This passage demonstrates that it is impossible to be alone as a Christian. Similar to a body, no individual body part can exist on its own. Every part of the body needs the other parts, because each part can only do so much. Every part of the body has an important role to play for the body to function properly.

Be sure to highlight our community identity by virtue of our baptism (verse 13). We are baptized in Christ and his body, which means that we are never alone.

Read John 15:12-17

Finish this sentence: Since Jesus chose to save me through his death, and since he also chose to save every other Christian...

In this passage, Jesus instructs his disciples to love one another. He reminds them that they did not come together on their own accord (15:16). He chose them individually and brought them together with his love and forgiveness. Their love for each other flows from their common calling by Jesus.

The question for your group to consider is "how?" How do we love others "as I have loved you" (as Jesus says)?

[It is worth noting that "you" in verse 16 is plural in the Greek. God called each of them as individuals, but at the same time he called them into one community.]

Read John 14:1-3.

Finish this sentence: God is preparing many rooms for me and all Christians to spend eternity **together** with Him, which means I should probably...

The goal here is to help youth think about how they treat other Christians now, in this life, in light of the fact that they will be together forever.

*Again, it is worth noting that "you" in John 14:1-3 are plural. Jesus is returning to take all believers in him, which is why he is preparing **many** rooms.*

The lasting permanence of Christian community gives our connection to other forgiven sinners a great depth. As we relate to one another in love, we should remember that we will be together forever.

Wrapping it Up

Have you ever noticed that some (if not most) of the best experiences we have in this life involve other people?

You might share a personal example of joy you experienced in community.

When God sent Jesus to die and rise for our salvation, he did not leave us alone. He put us together into a community called the church. In this community, He continues to love and forgive us, and He loves others through us as we love one another. You could put it like this: In this community we **live loved** by God in Christ. And we **live love** for others in His name.

Read Psalm 133:1.

What is one thing you can do as a group to help ensure that your time together (beginning now and lasting through the National Youth Gathering) is "good and pleasant"?

Go around the room and ask everyone to think of one way they can build up the unity of this group.

If you have not already come up with a group covenant for the Gathering, this might be a good time to put something together. For more information on creating a group covenant, visit www.lcmgathering.com/communitylife.

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

Through Your Son Jesus You have brought me into Your family. You've forgiven and welcomed me as your own child. But not just me! You've forgiven and welcomed us as your children, making us brothers and sisters in Christ for eternity. Help us to love one another. Give us Your Spirit of unity and peace, and strengthen us as Your people. Let everything we do as a group, and as members of the body of Christ, glorify You. In the name of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Living Love(d) Together

Part 2: Worship

Leader's notes are in italics.

Getting Started

Spend 60 seconds trying to list as many people as you can remember seeing during worship last Sunday.

The purpose of this activity is to help the participants realize how many people are part of their Christian community.

When else do you hang out with all of these people?

In many cases, most youth have no other reason to spend time with most of these particular people.

Have you ever been in the sanctuary of your congregation completely alone? If so, how was it different than when you were in the sanctuary with everyone for worship?

Allow for discussion.

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question:

“One who prays never prays alone.”

This is a quote from Life Together, 49.

What do we learn about God when we think about His instructions to us to worship together?

Robert Kolb, emeritus professor at Concordia Seminary, describes God as a “God of conversation and community.” God speaks to us, listens to us, and gathers us together in Christ. You might even describe the worship service as a conversation between us (plural!) and God.

To the Scriptures

In the following passages, we will examine what the Scriptures say about one of the most important parts of the Christian life: worship. In worship, God gathers us together around His Word and Sacraments to forgive us, strengthen us, and teach us. We respond to Him with praise, thanksgiving, and prayer. None of this takes place alone, however! After reading each passage, finish the following sentences in light of what you read.

In these passages, the participants will have the opportunity to put into their own words what they hear from the Scriptures. Encourage them to use the text to help them shape their responses. The leader responses below provide some guidance for you, but wait until they have had a chance to struggle with the sentence before giving them the “right” answer. It is recommended that you read through all the questions and try to answer them before you do the study with the youth.

These three passages were chosen because they inform our worship together as the body of Christ.

If your group is big you may want to break them into smaller groups to complete this part of the study.

Read Matthew 20:27-28.

Finish this sentence: God serves me in worship by...

This particular passage does not actually provide a lot of direction for finishing this sentence. Matthew 20 is not even directly about worship. But it is helpful here because it reminds us that God has come in Christ to serve us, not to be served. In the context of worship, youth might recognize God's service to them through the forgiveness we receive in the absolution and the Lord's Supper, the instructions we receive in the Scripture readings and sermons, and the encouragement we receive from the Gospel.

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

Finish this sentence: When I commune with the people of my congregation, together we...

There are a number of ways to finish this sentence. For example: Together we remember Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and promise to return. Together we receive forgiveness. Together we find strength for Christian living. Together we proclaim the Lord's death until he comes. You might paraphrase CFW Walther (the first president of the LCMS), who said that when the Christian congregation communes together, the pastor is not the only preacher in the building. The entire body of believers, by their communing together, proclaims the cross as well!

Read Hebrews 10:24-25.

Finish this sentence: I gather together with fellow believers to...

According to this passage, we gather together, not just for our own sake, but the sake of others. We gather together to encourage one another and spur them on toward good works. It is important to help them see that their participation in the worship and life of the congregation is not just for their own sake but also for the benefit of others.

Read Colossians 3:15-16.

Finish this sentence: When we sing together as a congregation we are actually...

Two ways to finish this sentence would be "we are actually talking to God" (praise and thanksgiving) or "we are actually telling others about God" (teaching and admonishing one another). Some hymns/songs are prayers and words of thanksgiving. These are forms of witness and proclamation. Other hymns/songs are prayers. In preparation for this question, you might identify several hymns/songs that your congregation sings as examples of each.

Wrapping it Up

Raise your hand if you have ever been to a Christmas Eve candlelight service.

If they have not, you will need to explain this tradition that takes place in many congregations. Such candlelight services usually include the congregation singing "Silent Night" as everyone holds a lit candle. The pastor normally lights his candle from the Christ candle, and then passes the flame on to others, who share the flame with others, until the entire congregation is aglow with warmth and light. Then they sing "Silent Night" by candlelight.

Describe the difference between a single person holding a single candle in a room and several hundred people each holding a candle in the same room.

Allow for discussion.

Worship is not something we do on our own. God brings us together and is present among us as we sing and pray, receive forgiveness and strength, and grow in faith toward God and in love toward one another. At the center of our worship is Christ, the only source of true light and warmth in this cold and dark world. As it is with the candlelight service, the light began in one place—the cross—but it came to us through God’s Word. And having received it, we share it with others until all can see and feel the light in their lives.

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

Through Your Son Jesus You have brought me into Your family. You’ve forgiven and welcomed me as your own child. But not just me! You’ve forgiven and welcomed us as your children, making us brothers and sisters in Christ for eternity. Help us to love one another. Give us Your Spirit of unity and peace, and strengthen us as Your people. Let everything we do as a group, and as members of the body of Christ, glorify You. In the name of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Living Love(d) Together

Part 3: Alone

Leader's notes are in italics.

Getting Started

Spend 60 seconds trying to figure out how much time you spend completely alone in an average week.

The purpose of this exercise is to take into account the fact that, despite our spiritual unity with other Christians, we are not always with them physically. The time we spend alone is usually greater than the time we spend together with the body of Christ.

Is it easier or harder to live like a Christian when you are alone? Why?

Allow for discussion.

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question.

“Only in the fellowship do we learn to be rightly alone and only in aloneness do we learn to live rightly in the fellowship.”

This is a quote from Life Together, 77.

How can being together on a regular basis in worship and fellowship help us when we are alone?

Allow for discussion

To the Scriptures

When Jesus came to suffer and die for our sins, he also spent some time by Himself. In the following passages, we will examine what Jesus did in His “alone” time. We will also consider the way we live when we are not gathered together with other believers. After reading each passage, finish the following sentences in light of what you read.

In these passages, the participants will have the opportunity to put into their own words what they hear from the Scriptures. Encourage them to use the text to help them shape their responses. The leader responses provide some guidance for you, but wait until they have had a chance to struggle with the sentence before giving them the “right” answer. It is recommended that you read through all the questions and try to answer them before you do the study with the youth.

If your group is big you may want to break them into smaller groups to complete this part of the study.

Read Matthew 14:22-23.

Finish this sentence: Since Jesus took time to be alone in prayer...

As Jesus made His way to the cross to suffer and die for our sins, He frequently dismissed Himself from the crowds to spend time in prayer. This suggests that we also should take some time away in prayer. In chapter three of Life Together, Bonhoeffer makes the point that we should spend frequent time alone for prayer and for meditating on the Scriptures. Jesus taking time away in prayer also indicates His continual unity with and dependence on the Father throughout His ministry.

Read 1 Peter 5:6-10.

Finish this sentence: Knowing that Christians around the world are going through the same kinds of struggles I'm going through...

Young people often feel alone or isolated, as if no one can understand or empathize with their struggles. Peter teaches us in these verses to be watchful against the schemes of the devil, and to take comfort knowing that we are not alone in our struggles. Not only are our brothers and sisters throughout the world dealing with similar difficulties, but God Himself has promised to "restore, confirm, strengthen, and establish" us (verse 10).

Read James 1:22-25.

Finish this sentence: When I do not put into practice the things I hear and learn in God's Word...

There are a number of ways to finish this sentence. Examples include, "...I'm deceiving myself." "...I am no better than unbelievers." "...I realize how much I need Jesus and His forgiveness." "...It is time to return to the cross and confess my sins." As you listen to how youth answer this question, keep in mind their need to hear both law and gospel—the need to be convicted of their sin, and the need to find comfort in Christ.

Wrapping it Up

Have you ever prayed for the members of your youth group? How about the other members of your congregation? Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a German Lutheran pastor, wrote this: "He who denies his neighbor the service of praying for him denies him the service of a Christian" (*Life Together*, 87).

One of the most important things you can do in your time alone is to pray to God through Jesus. Not just for yourself, however. Part of "living love(d)" toward others is praying for them. This includes the people we have a hard time liking (see Matthew 5:43-48). When we pray for others, we bring them into the presence of God and share in their needs, their sufferings, and their trials.

If you are not already doing so, assign each youth someone else in the group to pray for this week and throughout the Gathering. This could be done anonymously or in a way that people know who is praying for them. Then go around the room and let each person share a prayer request or two that the person praying for them can incorporate into their prayers.

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

Through Your Son Jesus You have brought me into Your family. You've forgiven and welcomed me as your own child. But not just me! You've forgiven and welcomed us as your children, making us brothers and sisters in Christ for eternity. Help us to love one another. Give us Your Spirit of unity and peace, and strengthen us as Your people. Let everything we do as a group, and as members of the body of Christ, glorify You. In the name of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Living Love(d) Together

Part 4: Serve

Leader's notes are in italics.

Getting Started

Spend 60 seconds listing everyone who served you in any way today.

Youth may have a hard time seeing all the people who have served them indirectly. Examples include their parents who got them up and provided breakfast for them, their teachers who helped them learn, the principal who keeps the school functioning, the janitors who cleaned the restrooms, the coaches who helped them learn skills, the farmers who grew the food they ate, the police who helped create a safe environment, etc. Do not forget to include yourself and the other volunteers who are serving them right now!

The purpose of this exercise is to help them see how much they need the service of other people. This will prepare them to recognize their need to serve others.

Have you ever participated in a “service project”? If so, describe how it affected the people you served, and how it affected you.

Allow for discussion.

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question:

“The church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren.”

Life Together, 109

What does a faithful Christian servant look like?

Allow for discussion

To the Scriptures

Christian service begins with thanksgiving to God for sending Jesus to suffer and die for our sins on a cross. In this study, we are going to consider some areas of service that are not usually part of a “service project.” They are more common, everyday ways of serving others. As you read through each area of service, consider specific people who might need this type of service from you. Under each heading there is a place for you to write someone’s name down who might need this service. Go ahead and fill it in.

This study draws heavily from chapter 4 of Life Together. If you have not been reading along in the book through the course of this study, this is a good time to start doing so. Chapter 4 highlights some areas of service that are sometimes overlooked. Each service will conclude with a quote from Life Together. You can use these quotes to summarize the point or to bring out something new. It is recommended that you read through all the questions and try to answer them before you do the study with the youth.

The Service of Holding Your Tongue

Read James 3:2-10. How can our tongues be so destructive?

Words are powerful. Contrary to the old rhyme, sticks and stones are not the only things that can hurt. Youth should be able understand this very well.

Read Ephesians 4:29-32. How should we use our words?

To build others up

“It must be a decisive rule of every Christian fellowship that each individual is prohibited from saying much that occurs to him.” *Life Together 92*

Some youth might need to think about this a few times to understand it. The point is that many of our thoughts are sinful and unchristian. Instead of speaking such things, we should repent for having them in the first place. Thankfully, Christ always forgives.

Who needs you to hold your tongue? _____

The Service of Humility

Read Philippians 2:3-4. Why is it hard to think of others as more significant than ourselves?

As sinful creatures, we look out for ourselves more than anyone else.

Read Romans 12:3. How should we think of ourselves?

With sober judgment. That is, by recognizing our own need for forgiveness.

“If my sinfulness appears to me to be in any way smaller or less detestable in comparison with the sins of others, I am still not recognizing my sinfulness at all.” *Life Together, 96*

Who needs you to consider them more important than yourself? _____

The Service of Listening

Read Proverbs 21:13. How does listening to others better enable us to serve them?

We do not know what they need until we listen to them. Sometimes we think we know what they need and act accordingly instead of listening first.

“Just as love to God begins with listening to His Word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is learning to listen to them.” *Life Together, 97.*

Who needs you to listen to them? _____

The Service of Bearing Burdens

Read Galatians 6:2. What does it mean to bear another's burden?

To bear someone's burden is to suffer with them, for them. To take on their hardship so that they do not have to go through it alone. Jesus bore the burden of our sin on the cross.

Read Ephesians 4:1-2. How does bearing with one another keep us united as Christians?

It reminds us of our mutual need and dependence on one another.

"It is the fellowship of the Cross to experience the burden of the other. If one does not experience it, the fellowship he belongs to is not Christian." *Life Together, 101*

Who has a burden that you can help bear? _____

The Service of Speaking

Read Ephesians 4:29. What should be our goal in speaking to others?

*To build them up with God's grace and mercy. The ESV translates this passage more accurately than the NIV when it says in the last phrase, "...that it may give **grace** to those who hear." This is worth noting because our goal in speaking to others is to share God's grace—His underserved love for us in Christ.*

Read Galatians 6:1. Why is it hard to speak up to a fellow Christian who is making sinful decisions?

We do not want to appear judgmental. For a helpful discussion of these very concerns, see Life Together, 105-107

"Nothing could be more cruel than the tenderness that consigns another to his sin. Nothing can be more compassionate than the severe rebuke that calls a brother back from the path of sin." *Life Together, 107.*

Who needs you to speak a word of rebuke to them? _____

Who needs you to speak a word of grace to them? _____

Wrapping it Up

Service is vital, not only for those being served but also for those who do the serving. Read and discuss why based on the following quote:

"A community which allows unemployed members to exist within it will perish because of them. It will be well, therefore, if every member receives a definite task to perform for the community, that he may know in hours of doubt that he, too, is not useless and unsable" (Life Together, 94).

If you have not yet assigned definite tasks to each member of your group attending the Gathering, now is the time to do so. Everyone needs to have some job on the trip, whether big or small. Examples include someone to lead daily devotions, someone to keep the group on schedule, someone to carry coolers/extra bags, someone to choose restaurants, someone to lead the way in traffic, someone to keep people smiling, someone to guard the snacks. (If you enlist youth to lead devotions, it is recommended that you help provide them with faithful devotional materials or

direction.) Be creative here. Find something for everyone to do. Make it official and hold everyone accountable. This will build up the unity of your group and make everyone feel as though they are part. THIS IS IMPORTANT: Resist the urge to do everything for your youth!

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

Through Your Son Jesus You have brought me into Your family. You've forgiven and welcomed me as your own child. But not just me! You've forgiven and welcomed us as your children, making us brothers and sisters in Christ for eternity. Help us to love one another. Give us Your Spirit of unity and peace, and strengthen us as Your people. Let everything we do as a group, and as members of the body of Christ, glorify You. In the name of Your Son, our Lord, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Living Love(d) Together

Part 5: Confession

Leader's notes are in italics.

*One of the purposes of this final study is to prepare participants for a life of repentance which involves regular confession and forgiveness. Most of the youth will have learned **about** confession and forgiveness in confirmation instruction, but fewer have probably experienced confession and forgiveness outside of the general confession we normally conduct during worship. The long term goal of this study is to encourage and enable participants to incorporate private confession and forgiveness into their lives.*

It is important, however, not to take this subject lightly. If you are not a pastor, it is strongly recommended that you speak with the pastor of your congregation before you do this Bible study. Let him know that you plan on teaching the youth about private confession and forgiveness and that you would like him to be present and available.

This is also a good time to check with your pastor about the legal requirements regarding confidentiality in confession. If you are not aware of existing laws regarding mandatory reporting, you should inform yourself before you go to the National Youth Gathering. In working with youth, it is always possible that a youth will share sensitive information with you (whether you go to the National Youth Gathering or not). You should be prepared to deal with such situations appropriately.

Getting Started

Spend 60 seconds listing in your head every sin you committed this week.

The purpose of this exercise is to help participants take seriously sin, as both actions and a condition we are in, and to take seriously our own sin. It is possible that they will not think of much. If you sense the youth in your group might be in that position, you might want to begin by briefly reviewing the 10 Commandments—especially Luther's explanations in the Small Catechism.

(For reflection only) Which sins do you find most difficult to avoid?

Do not ask for responses here. *Just ask them to reflect on their own personal temptations and struggles with sin.*

It is good to feel guilty for your sin? Why or why not?

Guilt is not pleasant, but it can be helpful. It helps you realize you have a problem. Sin separates us from God and one another. In this sense, it is like pain from a tumor. Without the pain, you would not go to the doctor and would not find the cancer that threatens your life. Guilt can help us see we have sinned and lead us to seek forgiveness in Christ.

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question:

"He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone."

Life Together, 110

Why do we hide our sins (especially the really bad ones) from other people?

Allow for discussion.

To the Scriptures

The good news that permeates the entire Bible is that Jesus came to suffer and die for our sins. Because of His sacrifice on the cross, there is no sin that God cannot forgive, no mistake He cannot wash away by the blood of Christ. God has promised to forgive our sins when we confess them to Him, and He is always faithful to His promises. The following passages help us understand the effects of sin and the blessings of forgiveness in Christ.

Read Psalm 32:1-5. Describe this person's situation before he confessed his sin to the Lord.

Totally sapped spiritually and even physically.

Recall the Bonhoeffer quote above: "He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone."

Read 1 John 1:8-9. What is the only way to get rid of sin?

Confess it and receive forgiveness.

Read James 5:16. To whom should we confess our sins?

"to one another"—that is, fellow baptized and believing Christians

Read John 20:21-23. How can other people forgive sins?

Jesus sent his church—first apostles, then pastors and baptized Christians to forgive the sins of those who repent. In this passage, Jesus gives the church the command to forgive sins in His name and by His authority. Pastors do this publically on behalf of the congregation during corporate worship, but the command Jesus gives us to forgive others in His name extends to all baptized Christians.

Practicing Confession and Forgiveness

Okay. We confess our sins in worship on a regular basis. But we usually stay pretty general. "I have sinned against You in thought, word, and deed..." we say during worship sometimes. This is a good and valid confession, and the words of forgiveness spoken by the pastor in worship are from God Himself. But another type of confession in the Lutheran church is private confession and forgiveness. Have you ever confessed specific sins in private to someone?

If anyone has, ask them to describe the experience of confessing a specific sin to another person. (Do not ask them to describe the sin!)

God does not require that we confess specific sins to one another in private. But Christians throughout the centuries have found great comfort in verbalizing specific sins to a fellow believer in Jesus, especially when a specific sin troubles them. So let me ask you: Is there a specific sin in your life that bothers you? Is there something you have done or said or thought that you do not like to think about because thinking about it makes you feel guilty—even after you have confessed it generally in worship? If that is the case, you might benefit from confessing that specific sin to a pastor, youth leader, or fellow baptized Christian.

But how?

Let us practice. Think of one of the sins that came to mind in the first exercise of this study. Pick a common, everyday sin—lying, for instance. Turn to the person next to you and confess this sin. Then, in response to the person who confesses his or her sin to you, say, "Jesus died for that and all your sins. You are forgiven."

Pair up the youth for this exercise. Encourage the youth not to divulge their deepest and darkest sins at this point. The idea here is that, by having them confess common sins to one another, they get some experience repenting out loud and hearing forgiveness for specific sins.

KEY: *All sins are equal in God's eyes. But some sins are more private, and for that reason they should only be confessed to a church professional, such as a pastor.*

Some youth might be a little uncomfortable with this. They might react to this discomfort by getting silly or by shutting down. If they get silly, try to encourage them to take it seriously and be respectful. If they start shutting down, do not force them to do this exercise.

Confessing common, everyday sins might not be too difficult. But what about sins that are more personal? How can I confess those to another person? Thankfully, the process is exactly the same. Simply speak the sins that weigh you down and listen to God's words of forgiveness.

Perhaps there is a sin in your life that is too personal to confess to someone in this group. That is okay. This is one of the reasons God provides pastors for us. Pastors are always available to hear private confession, speak God's words of forgiveness, and keep it to themselves. You do not have to do it today or tomorrow. But know that at any time, your pastor would be happy to hear your confession confidentially and speak God's forgiving words of love to you.

Suggestion: Ask the pastor of your congregation to be present for this study and available afterwards for private confession. Some youth may not be interested in doing this now but might want to at a later date. The pastor might also offer other times to be available for private confession. You might also encourage the other Adult Leader(s) to consider practicing private confession.

Closing Prayer

Dear Heavenly Father,

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