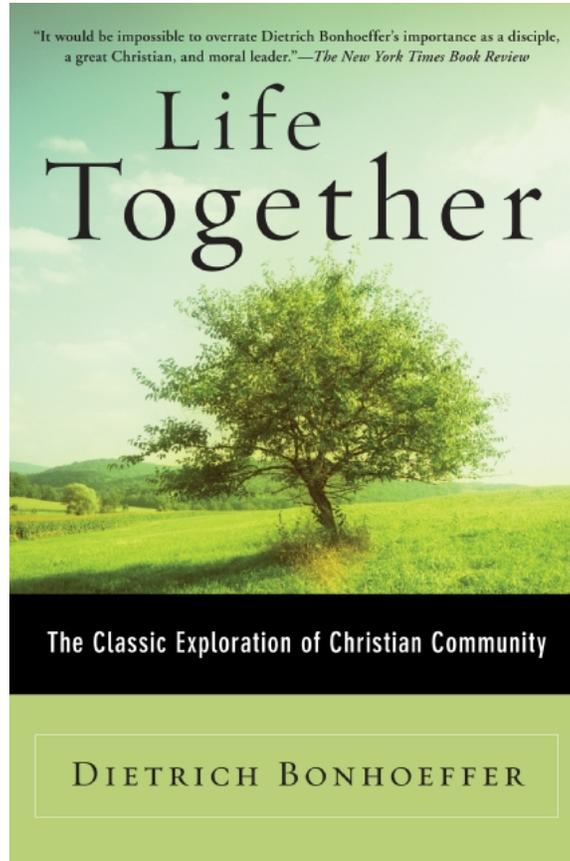


Living Love(d) Together Bible Study

Based on Life Together by Dietrich Bonhoeffer



—LIVE LOVE(D)

Living Love(d) Together Bible Study

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)



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 Flossenbürg. (An estimated 73,000 victims were put to death at Flossenbürg 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."

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?

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

From the Scriptures...

Read 1 Peter 4:12-19.

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

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?

How should we respond to suffering as Christians?

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

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

Getting Started

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

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

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 (p.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.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:12-27.

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

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...

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...

Wrapping it Up

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

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”?

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

Getting Started

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

When else do you hang out with all of these 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?

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question:

“One who prays never prays alone (p. 49).”

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

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.

Read Matthew 20:27-28.

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

Read 1 Corinthians 11:23-26.

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

Read Hebrews 10:24-25.

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

Read Colossians 3:15-16

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

Wrapping it Up

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

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.

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

Getting Started

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

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

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 (p.77).”

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

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.

Read Matthew 14:22-23.

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

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...

Read James 1:22-2.5

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

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.

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

Getting Started

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

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

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question:

“The church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren (p.109).”

What does a faithful Christian servant look like?

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.

The Service of Holding Your Tongue

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

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

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

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?

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

“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 (p.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?

“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 (p.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?

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

“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 (p.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?

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

“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 (p.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 unusable” (Life Together, 94).

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

Getting Started

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

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

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

Consider this statement and then discuss the following question:

“He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone (p.110).”

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

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.

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

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

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

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?

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.”

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.

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.