

Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Discussion Guide

Life Together, by Dietrich Bonhoeffer (HarperSanFrancisco, copyright © 1954), explores the joys of Christian fellowship within a community of believers. He offers insights on such topics as prayer, morning devotions, meditation, intercession, confession, and working together with others in ministry. The book shows how to live and grow spiritually together in Christ from the beginning of each day until day's end.

Permission is granted to reproduce this discussion guide.

Chapter 1

Community

This chapter shows how being a Christian means being in community through and in Jesus Christ.

1. Explain your interest in this book and your purpose in reading it.
2. In your own words, share what “community” means to you.
3. What is the importance of having community with other Christians? List some of the benefits.
4. Why do Christians yearn for the physical presence of other Christians?
5. In what way is fellowship with other Christians a gift from God? Why is this gift sometimes taken for granted?
6. Share a time when you experienced the closeness of Christian community.
7. What is wrong with visionary dreaming about what the ideal Christian community should be? How does this set up false expectations for both God and the community?
8. Discuss the obligation of the individual belonging to a Christian community.
9. What does it mean to dwell together in Christian unity?

10. Explain how Christian community is a spiritual, not human, reality. What does this mean?
11. What new insights about community did you receive from reading this chapter?
12. How has this discussion helped you?

Chapter 2

The Day With Others

This chapter shares how to spiritually begin each day and dwell in unity with other Christians.

1. Share how you spiritually begin a new day.
2. Why should we begin each morning with the praise and worship of God? What should one's attitude be?
3. Do you find the discipline of morning devotions difficult? Why or why not?
4. Explain what connects you to other Christians in the morning and through the day.
5. Why are common devotions so important? What should they include?
6. In your own words, explain the secret of the Psalter.
7. Share some psalms that are favorites for your morning devotions.
8. What can Christians learn from the prayer of the psalms? What can psalms teach us?
9. Why is reading scripture such an important part of devotion? List and discuss common struggles Christians have in reading and understanding scripture.
10. What element does singing hymns add to morning devotions?
11. What does Bonhoeffer say about "free prayer" and "common prayer"?
12. How has this discussion changed the way that you think about and practice your own devotions?

Chapter 3

The Day Alone

This chapter explores the importance of silence and meditation in the life of a Christian.

1. Discuss the relation of spending time alone and of spending time in community. How are the two necessarily interrelated?
2. List the benefits of spending time alone with God.
3. What's the relationship between silence and right speech?
4. How can you grow spiritually from practicing silence?
5. Share how you feel when you experience Christian solitude and silence.
6. What is meditation and why should you set aside a time for it daily?
7. Why is it important to be alone with the Word?
8. List and discuss ways to make the most of meditation time.
9. Discuss the challenges of meditation. Share any difficulties you have.
10. What did you learn about intercession from this chapter?
11. Discuss how meditation is tested during the workday.
12. What new insights did you receive from reading this chapter? How has this discussion helped you?

Chapter 4

Ministry

This chapter looks at ministry in word and deed within the Christian community.

1. What new insights about ministry did you receive from reading this chapter?
2. What causes self-justification? How does it cause division within a community, and how can it be overcome?
3. Discuss some good guidelines for watching what you say to others.
4. What damage can be caused by speaking ill of others?
5. Discuss how weak Christians need strong Christians and strong Christians need weak Christians within the fellowship of believers.
6. In your own words, explain what it means to practice meekness. Why is meekness sometimes confused with weakness? What's the difference?

7. How can listening sometimes be a greater service than speaking?
8. Discuss how helping others means allowing your own schedule to be interrupted by God.
9. What acts of service to others are included in the bearing of burdens?
10. Explain how the freedom of another person is a burden to the Christian.
11. How are we *all* (not simply ordained ministers) responsible for the ministry of proclamation? What does this mean?
12. Discuss the ministry of authority and the meaning of genuine authority. How is trust related to it?

Chapter 5

Confession and Communion

This chapter looks at bringing your sins before God and how it prepares Christians for Holy Communion.

1. What does it mean that God loves the sinner, but hates sin?
2. Explain how sin isolates you from others and from God. What sets you free from this isolation?
3. What does it mean that in confession, a break-through to community takes place?
4. What happens when we confess our sins to God and to one another?
5. What is the connection between confession, the cross, and new life?
6. Explain why pride is the root of all sin.
7. What does it mean that in confession, a person breaks through to certainty?
8. Why is it easier to confess sins to God rather than to another Christian?
9. Why are we better off to confess to a fellow Christian rather than someone like a psychologist?
10. What are some dangers of confession?
11. How does confession prepare a person for Holy Communion?
12. How has this book helped you grow spiritually?