

LIVE THE GOSPEL

**A Study on the Christian Life with
Thoughts from Dietrich Bonhoeffer**



VINTAGE**CHURCH**

Introduction

Throughout the summer we'll be studying what Jesus has to say about Christian community, and we're thrilled to offer this nine-week study in conjunction with our summer sermon series. We hope this resource challenges us as a church to grow deeper in our faith and in our relationships so we can "stir one another up" in our love for Jesus and one another. (Hebrews 4:10-24-25)

As you work through this study you'll notice each day has a response component. We encourage you to dive deep into what you're learning through your scriptural study and to take your time with fleshing out your response in these pages. In the months and years to come you'll be able to look back on your responses and thank God for how he has worked in your life.

You'll also notice that each week has a specific quote from an author named Dietrich Bonhoeffer, intended as commentary on each week's topic and scriptural passages. Bonhoeffer's contributions to Christian community are monumental and incredibly relevant for discussing what it means to live the Christian life.

About Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a German pastor, theologian, author, and spy. He founded the Confessing Church in Germany just after Nazi leadership took control of his country. Throughout Nazi rule he passionately denounced their political tyranny, Jewish persecution, and influence over the established German church. Later in his career Bonhoeffer participated in the German resistance movement, for which he was imprisoned and eventually executed.

Bonhoeffer authored a host of works, including his best-known *The Cost of Discipleship*. In 1939, while teaching through his secret seminaries, Bonhoeffer wrote a thin little book called *Life Together*. *Life Together* is simply about the way Christians live in community with one another, featuring Bonhoeffer's amazing insight into the weighty implications of the gospel on our daily lives. We are excited to include passages from *Life Together* and Bonhoeffer's prison letters in this study as commentary on biblical passages relating to the way Christians build Christian community. We hope Bonhoeffer's contributions will be encouraging and challenging as you consider what it means to live the Christian life.

WEEK ONE

THE GOSPEL AND COMMUNITY *part one*

Monday, June 12

Read Hebrews 10:23-25. Now read the excerpt below from Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*:

The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother's is sure.

And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as the bringers of the message of salvation. - Page 23

RESPOND

1. What are your first reactions to this passage and the quote from *Life Together*?
2. What words and phrases do Hebrews 10:23-25 and Bonhoeffer use to describe the need we have for fellow believers? How does that compare with how you typically feel about your need for others?

PRAY

As you close, take a moment to pray that God would make you receptive as he grows you through his word. Pray for an attentive mind and a willing heart as you study his word and process it this week.

NOTES

Tuesday, June 13

Read John 2:1-12. In John 2 Jesus miraculously provides wine for a wedding that had run dry. But why? Why did Jesus care about their wine supply?

Wine was present at every Jewish celebration. It was a symbol of joy; Psalm 104 thanks God for giving “wine to gladden the heart of man.” A wedding running out of wine was a serious misfortune, which is why Mary was concerned enough to ask Jesus to rescue the party. But Jesus took the opportunity to do something more than refill everyone’s glass.

Jesus asked for the jars of water at the door. These jars were there so that party guests could perform ritualistic washing as they entered. This was highly religious, and was often used as an ostentatious way to say, “Look how holy I am.” It was also required. To be a part of the festivities, you had to wash.

NOTES

But Jesus asked for the water so that it could serve a different purpose. He turned the water of ritual into the wine of joy. He offered the partygoers something better than religious observance, he offered them delight and affirmation. Jesus offered the same thing to us through his life, death, and resurrection: freedom from dead religious duty and freedom to joy and life in him.

RESPOND

1. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach through his miracle?
2. How does this passage display Jesus’ heart for others?

PRAY

Before you finish, take time to pray that God would increase your faith, that you would see the joy he offers you in Christ, and that you would respond to him in thanks.

Wednesday, June 14

Read Hebrews 10:23-25 again. Then, reread the Bonhoeffer quote from Monday:

The Christian needs another Christian who speaks God’s Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain, his brother’s is sure.

And that also clarifies the goal of all Christian community: they meet one another as the bringers of the message of salvation. - *Life Together*, Page 23

RESPOND

1. What does Bonhoeffer mean that “the Christ in [your] heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of [your] brother”? Can you recall a time when a sister or brother in Christ shared scripture in a way that encourage your faith?
2. How does stirring one another up help us “hold fast the confession of our hope”?

PRAY

Take time to pray, asking God for strength and wisdom as you assess ways to persevere in obedience to his word. Ask for awareness and insight into your life, and thank him for his mercy.

NOTES

Thursday, June 15

Read Colossians 3:12-17. Take a moment to read back over your response to the questions from Monday.

RESPOND

1. How is Colossians 3:12-17 a picture of what Bonhoeffer called “[meeting] one another as the bringers of the message of salvation”?
2. Think through the practical application of this passage. How is God calling you to obey this scripture? Consider relationships with family, friends, neighbors, and people in your community group.

NOTES

PRAY

Pray that God would help you as you try to put into practice what you’re learning. Pray that he would help you put on love and lead you in obeying his word.

Friday, June 16

Read Ephesians 4:1-16. Now take a look back at your response from yesterday.

RESPOND

1. According to Ephesians 4:11-12, how have you been equipped for building up the body of Christ?
2. How will you plan on being a “bearer...of the divine word of salvation” to others? How will you invite others to bear the word of God to you? Think through how you can start doing this in your day-to-day life, not out of ritual observance but out of joy.

PRAY

Close by praying over what you’ve written and by asking for God’s help as you try to bear his word to others. Ask him to help others bear his word to your heart. Ask for help in trusting that it’s not your performance in this area that saves you, and that you would respond to his love for you in joyful surrender.

NOTES

WEEK TWO

THE GOSPEL AND COMMUNITY *part two*

Monday, June 19

Read Ephesians 2:1-10. Now read the excerpt from *Life Together* below:

Christian community is like the Christian's sanctification. It is a gift of God which we cannot claim. Only God knows the real state of our fellowship, of our sanctification. What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases. – Page 30

RESPOND

1. What are the parallels between the verse in Ephesians and this quote from Bonhoeffer?
2. What does Bonhoeffer mean by saying Christian community is something we receive from God?

PRAY

Before you end, take some time to pray that God would open your heart to hear his word and that you would listen.

NOTES

Tuesday, June 20

Read Luke 7:11-17

In Luke 7:11-17 Jesus stepped into a hopeless situation, the death of a widow's only son, and brought hope. Imagine the immense pain at losing your only child. On top of that, without a husband or a son this first-century woman would have had very few options for making a living. She likely would have been economically shackled and impoverished for the rest of her life. Yet Jesus walked up to her and said, "Do not weep." He was the only one who could give her a reason to dry her tears.

This story highlights two aspects of Jesus: his divinity and his empathy. It shows his power over death and his understanding of human suffering. He had compassion on this woman and did what only God can do: turn death into life and weeping into rejoicing.

RESPOND

1. How does this passage display Jesus' heart for others?
2. How is the weeping and rejoicing in this crowd a picture of Christian community?

PRAY

Close by praying that God would increase your faith and characterize you with joy. Thank God for his love for you and the hope you have in Jesus.

NOTES

Wednesday, June 21

Read Ephesians 2:11-22. Now take a moment to reread this quote from Bonhoeffer:

Christian community is like the Christian's sanctification. It is a gift of God which we cannot claim. Only God knows the real state of our fellowship, of our sanctification. What may appear weak and trifling to us may be great and glorious to God. Just as the Christian should not be constantly feeling his spiritual pulse, so, too, the Christian community has not been given to us by God for us to be constantly taking its temperature. The more thankfully we daily receive what is given to us, the more surely and steadily will fellowship increase and grow from day to day as God pleases. - Page 30

RESPOND

- 1.** How does being “far off” but having been “brought near” help us understand Christian community? How does that hallmark of Christian community help us relate to others?
- 2.** Look at Ephesians 2:19-22. What gets in the way of our communities looking like this? How could you help your community group or your church become more like this passage?

PRAY

Close by praying that God would help you as you strive to live in Christian community and make you aware to ways you can grow in pursuing community.

NOTES

Thursday, June 22

Read Matthew 25:14-30

RESPOND

1. How is Christian community a gift from God that we are entrusted with?
 2. How do you want to grow specifically in your faithfulness towards other believers around you?
- Think back to last week and how we encourage one another with the word of Christ.

PRAY

As you finish, take a moment to pray that God would help you in your efforts for faithfulness. Pray that you would trust all the more in the satisfactory work of Jesus' death on your behalf.

NOTES

Friday, June 23

Read Hebrews 12:1-3 and Hebrews 12:12-14

RESPOND

1. Why do we need more endurance in our pursuit of Jesus? How do other believer help us increase our endurance?
2. Think through how you can ask others to encourage you in running with endurance. Make a plan of action: who will you ask? Who will you encourage in return?

PRAY

Pray that God would help you as you try to put into action what you're learning from his word. Pray that he would strengthen the relationships you have and that he would use them to increase your spiritual endurance. Pray that you would be willing in helping others endure faithfully.

NOTES

WEEK THREE

THE BIBLE AND COMMUNITY

Monday, June 26

Read Romans 5:6-11

Now read the excerpt below from *Life Together*:

It is not that God's help and presence must still be proved in our life; rather God's presence and help have been demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, in God's Son Jesus Christ, than to discover what God intends for us today. The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I will die. And the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, will be raised on the day of judgment...I find no salvation in my life history, but only in the history of Jesus Christ.

- Page 54

RESPOND

1. Bonhoeffer is explaining that we don't need God to do something miraculous in our life to prove he loves us. We have enough proof of his love in Jesus. Why do you think we're more inclined to want extra proof of God's love for us rather than just looking to "the history of Jesus Christ"?

PRAY

Close by praying that God would open your heart to his word this week and that you would regularly look to Jesus as proof for just how much he loves you.

NOTES

Tuesday, June 27

Read Mark 4:1-9. This is a familiar passage for many, in which Jesus explains the gospel rooting or not rooting in our hearts with a metaphor about four different types of soil. Jesus explains what those four soils are in Mark 4:10-20.

RESPOND

1. What does it mean to have the gospel rooted in your heart, “yielding thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold”?
2. What “thorns” are you prone to that choke out a love for the gospel in your life?

PRAY

End by praying that God would increase your faith and help the gospel yield a harvest in you. Ask the Lord for help as you think through how to encourage other believers in having the gospel grow up within them.

NOTES

Wednesday, June 28

Read Psalm 19

RESPOND

1. How does this psalm make you feel about God and his word?
2. Think back to your response yesterday. How does the emotion of this psalm towards God's word relate to the gospel bearing fruit in your life?

PRAY

Often we pray that God would create within us some trait or habit we desire. If this psalm leads you to ask God to increase your love for his word or devotion to his word, do it. Thinking back to the scripture we studied yesterday, pray also that God would increase your awareness of any rocks or thorns that might be choking your heart out of a love for his word.

NOTES

Thursday, June 29

Read Hebrews 10:23-25, then reread the Bonhoeffer quote we looked at on Monday:

It is not that God’s help and presence must still be proved in our life; rather God’s presence and help have been demonstrated for us in the life of Jesus Christ. It is in fact more important for us to know what God did to Israel, in God’s Son Jesus Christ, than to discover what God intends for us today. The fact that Jesus Christ died is more important than the fact that I will die. And the fact that Jesus Christ was raised from the dead is the sole ground of my hope that I, too, will be raised on the day of judgment...I find no salvation in my life history, but only in the history of Jesus Christ.
- *Life Together*, Page 54

RESPOND

1. How does affection for God’s word help us “hold fast the confession of our hope”?
2. How do we stir up one another in our love for God’s word? Think through your relationships and community, considering specific examples.

PRAY

Close by praying that God would give you a deep, abiding affection for his word, and that that affection would spill over into your relationships with other believers. Pray that God would help you by sending other believers to stir you up in your affections.

NOTES

Friday, June 30

Read Colossians 3:12-17

RESPOND

- 1. How does this passage call us to interact with one another through God's word?
- 2. How can you grow in letting the word of Christ dwell in you richly? How will that affect your relationships with others?
- 3. In what ways do you currently encourage people or give advice? If you don't tend to share scripture, what is the reason?

PRAY

Close your study this week by praying that God would birth within you a love for his word that pours out into your relationships with others. Thinking back to our study on Monday, remember that salvation is found not in your history or in your performance, but in Jesus alone. Take a moment to thank God for his mercy towards you in this.

NOTES

WEEK FOUR

THE SPIRIT AND COMMUNITY

Monday, July 3

Read Ephesians 2:14. Now read the excerpt from *Life Together* below:

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; rather it is a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. - Page 30

RESPOND

1. How do Ephesians 2:14 and this excerpt echo the points of study from last week?
2. What does it mean that Christian community is a “reality created by God”? How does this affect our view of community?

PRAY

Finish out your time by praying for receptivity this week. Ask God for help in making time to study his word, being attentive to what he says through it, and being willing to have him change you with it.

NOTES

Tuesday, July 4

Read John 3:1-15

RESPOND

1. How was Jesus calling Nicodemus to rethink what it meant to be faithful to God?
2. How is Christian community born of the Spirit? How does this alter the people within that community?

PRAY

Relying on the movement of the Spirit in your life takes faith. Pray that God would increase your faith and that your soul would thirst for God. (Psalm 42:2)

NOTES

Wednesday, July 5

Read Romans 8:26-30

RESPOND

1. How does this text show the work of the Spirit in the lives of believers?
2. In what ways do you tend to resist being “conformed to the image of [Jesus]”?

PRAY

Pray that God would give you the eyes to see the ways you resist his work in your life. We all do this to some degree or another; we prefer our old ways over the “new creation” life. Pray that God would make you receptive the ways he want to conform you to the image of his Son.

NOTES

Thursday, July 6

Read Acts 2:42-47

Often times we read this passage from Acts and we respond by trying to recreate the exact community it describes. We take the aspects of this particular Christian community and create from them a prescription for the communities around us. By doing this we take a story of faith and turn it into a standard of obedience. This is the opposite of what we looked at on Tuesday, June 13; it's turning the wine of joy back into the water of ritual.

Take a moment to reread the Bonhoeffer quote from Monday:

Christian brotherhood is not an ideal which we must realize; rather it is a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. - *Life Together*, Page 30

RESPOND

1. How were the believers in Acts 2:42-47 participating in a “reality created by God in Christ”? How were they letting their faith in Jesus shape the way they lived their lives?
2. How can we build Christian community without turning to idealistic legalism?

PRAY

End your time by praying that God would help you work to build up your faith and the faith of others around you without making it a work of legalism. Pray that God would stir up your affections for him and fill you with awe.

NOTES

Friday, July 7

Read Acts 2:1-41. It's long but it's worth it.

RESPOND

1. Think back over your responses yesterday. How does the work of the Holy Spirit lead to the kind of community described in Acts 2:42-47?
2. How can you grow in asking the Holy Spirit to work in your life and in the community around you? Think through practical ways you can ask for help in your times of prayer, and give it a shot as you pray today.

PRAY

Close by praying for the movement of the Holy Spirit in your life and in the community around you. Pray that God would work mightily to conform you to the image of Jesus and use you in the lives of those around you.

NOTES

WEEK FIVE

PRAYER AND COMMUNITY

Monday, July 10

First, read James 5:16. Then, read this excerpt from *Life Together* on praying for others:

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner.

- Page 86

RESPOND

1. Why do you think Bonhoeffer says praying for one another is so important to Christian fellowship?
2. Look at James 5:16. How does praying for another believer help heal you?

PRAY

Praying for another person can be challenging, especially if your personalities clash in some way. Take a moment to pray that God would increase your faith in prayer. Think about folks around you who need prayer, especially the folks you aren't prone to pray for, and pray for them.

NOTES

Tuesday, July 11

Read Luke 18:1-8, then look back at James 5 and read James 5:16-18.

Men and women throughout scripture prayed crazy prayers. James 5 talks specifically about Elijah, who prayed for a drought to punish Israel and King Ahab for their idolatry (1 Kings 17-18). Yet James says Elijah “was a man with a nature like ours.” He didn’t have weather-controlling super powers. He was a normal mortal guy.

So why does James make this specific point after telling us to pray for one another? Because we need to know that prayer works, but not because of us. Prayer works because God is mighty. Prayer is in no way dependent on you and your nature because it, in its essence, is an appeal to God’s nature as all-powerful, all-knowing, loving, and kind. To think that prayer is dependent on you is to forget to whom you pray.

Jesus, in Luke 18:1-8, hits the one aspect of prayer that is within our power: persistence. What this doesn’t mean is that God will eventually give

in, no matter your prayer. Just because you pray to win the lottery every day doesn’t mean it will eventually happen. Look at verses 6-8 in Luke 18. They describe a people who are in desperate need of God himself, not a bunch of nagging lottery players. Jesus is telling his followers to pray diligently, pray fervently, and pray often. Doing so aligns us with God’s will for us and may very well move the heart of God himself.

RESPOND

1. How does Luke 18:1-8 and the persistent widow teach you how to pray?
2. Think back to yesterday. How might praying diligently help change your heart towards others?

PRAY

Close by taking a moment to think through the way you normally pray. What big things in your life do you shy away from praying for? What people do you leave out of your prayers because you think they’re beyond the reach of God’s influence? Pray that God would increase your faith in prayer, and pray for anyone who comes to mind or who came to mind yesterday in your study.

NOTES

Wednesday, July 12

Read Matthew 5:21-26 and 1 John 4:20-21

Now look back at the Bonhoeffer quote from Monday:

A Christian fellowship lives and exists by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses. I can no longer condemn or hate a brother for whom I pray, no matter how much trouble he causes me. His face, that hitherto may have been strange and intolerable to me, is transformed in intercession into the countenance of a brother for whom Christ died, the face of a forgiven sinner.

- Life Together, Page 86

RESPOND

1. Why does Jesus take anger towards another person so seriously?
2. Think back to your response from Monday. How do prayer and reconciliation help heal you?

PRAY

Reflect on these texts and how Jesus is speaking to you through them. Pray that he would reveal any ways in which you harbor anger towards others. Pray for wisdom and discernment in bringing these things to God.

NOTES

Thursday, July 13

Read Romans 8:26-27 and 8:34

These sections in Romans tell us that both Jesus and the Holy Spirit intercede for us. Take a moment to think about that: God himself prays for you. Not only does he pray for you, he prays for those around you.

RESPOND

1. How do these texts move your heart to respond to God?
2. How do they move you to pray for others?

NOTES

PRAY

Close by thanking God for his continual love and kindness towards you. Pray that his love would work through you towards others, and that he would help you pray earnestly for others like he prays for you.

Friday, July 14

Read Galatians 6:2

RESPOND

1. This text shows us that all people need help with their burdens. How does that motivate you towards the body of Christ, his church?
2. How can you grow in asking for help with your own burdens?

PRAY

Pray and ask for the Lord’s help in both assisting others with their burdens and inviting them to assist with yours. Consider how you can continue in prayer for those around you and put this into daily practice moving forward. Prayer takes work, so don’t hesitate to ask the Lord for help with this.

NOTES

WEEK SIX

CONFESSION AND COMMUNITY *part one*

Monday, July 17

Read Galatians 6:1-2

Now read this excerpt from *Life Together*:

Christ became our Brother in order to help us.

Through him our brother has become Christ for us in the power and authority of the commission Christ has given him. Our brother stands before us the sign of the truth and the grace of God. He has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ's stead and he forgives our sins in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it. When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God."
- page 112

RESPOND

1. How does hearing someone confess their sin give you an opportunity to love them like Jesus loves you?
2. How does confessing our sin to one another invite God to work in our lives?

PRAY

Close by praying that God would make your heart fertile ground to receive his word and that he would give you courage to boldly believe what he says through it. Pray that he would give you a passion for his word this week as you study it.

NOTES

Tuesday, July 18

Read Luke 13:10-17

For the Pharisees, keeping the Sabbath was a way to demand exacting religious obedience out of others. They took God’s commandment to not do any work on the Sabbath (Exodus 20:8-11) to an extreme level, adding tons of extra nuances. They went so far as to specify which kinds of knots you could or could not tie on the Sabbath. If your shoe came untied, you were out of luck.

Included in the Pharisees’ prohibitions was healing on the Sabbath. We see Jesus challenge this specific bit of legalism multiple times in the gospels, including in Matthew 12:9-14, in which he healed another person on the Sabbath. After this the Pharisees were so mad they conspired to kill Jesus.

In these situations Jesus points out to the Pharisees that mercy is better than rule-keeping. The Pharisees say that healing should be done in the way they deem appropriate. In Luke 13 Jesus defiantly responds, “This woman has faith. If she can be freed, shouldn’t she be?”

RESPOND

1. How does Jesus bring us freedom from the captivity of our sin through forgiveness?
2. How does this go against the grain of legalism?

PRAY

Close by praying that God would grant you faith to believe the depths to which you have been forgiven and freed by Jesus. Pray that he would increase your faith to walk in freedom.

NOTES

Wednesday, July 19

Start by reading Galatians 5:1 and 5:13. Now take a look back over the quote from Bonhoeffer we read on Monday:

Christ became our Brother in order to help us.

Through him our brother has become Christ for us in the power and authority of the commission Christ has given him. Our brother stands before us the sign of the truth and the grace of God. He has been given to us to help us. He hears the confession of our sins in Christ's stead and he forgives our sins in Christ's name. He keeps the secret of our confession as God keeps it.

When I go to my brother to confess, I am going to God."

- Life Together, page 112

RESPOND

1. Think back to your response yesterday. How does Jesus use confession to free you just like he healed the disabled woman?

PRAY

Before you end, pray that God would give you awareness of anything in your life that needs to be confessed to him or to your fellow believers. Pray that he would make you passionate in following Jesus and living in freedom from sin.

NOTES

Thursday, July 20

Read 1 John 1:5-10. Take a moment to reflect back over your response to yesterday's questions.

RESPOND

1. Bringing your sin into the light requires confession. What is scary about confessing your sins to God? What about confessing to others?
2. What promises are there in 1 John 1:5-10 about the freedom found in confession?

PRAY

Don't rush to end your time today. Really take a moment to consider if anything is standing in the way of you bringing your sin to light in confession. Pray that the Lord would give you courage and help you find freedom from any area of sin by which you might be bound.

NOTES

Friday, July 21

Read Colossians 3:12-14

Asking someone for forgiveness when you're at fault is a confession of sin (if it isn't, you might be doing it wrong). Extending forgiveness to someone else is a way to receive that confession like Jesus receives you.

RESPOND

1. How does forgiving each other help us walk in freedom?
2. In what ways do you need to grow in asking for, receiving, or giving forgiveness?

NOTES

PRAY

Pray that the Lord would help you as you strive to forgive as you have been forgiven. Ask the Lord for eyes to see the ways you can grow in this area, and courage to face your weaknesses.

WEEK SEVEN

CONFESSION AND COMMUNITY *part two*

Monday, July 24

Read James 5:16. Now read the excerpt below from *Life Together*:

“Confess your faults one to another” (Jas. 5:16). He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final break-through to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!

But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God

who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; He wants you alone. “My son, give me thine heart” (Prov. 23.26). God has come to you to save the sinner. Be glad! This message is liberation through truth. You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as you are, He wants to be gracious to you. You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; you can dare to be a sinner. – Page 110-111

RESPOND

1. What’s your initial reaction to Bonhoeffer’s thoughts on James 5:16? Does the thought of being a sinner, or hiding your sin, make you uncomfortable?
2. Think back to your study last week. How does confessing your sin lead to freedom?

PRAY

Close by praying that God would make you alive to his word this week and that he would use it to work mightily in your life.

Tuesday, July 25

Read John 4:1-26

RESPOND

1. The woman didn't initiate a conversation about her sin. Why do you think Jesus brought it up? How did Jesus handle the conversation?
2. How was Jesus compassionate towards the woman at the well?

PRAY

Take a moment to thank Jesus for his love and mercy towards you. Thank him for receiving you as he did the woman at the well and for loving you with a love you can't fathom.

NOTES

Wednesday, July 26

Take a moment to reflect back on your study from yesterday and read John 4:39-42.

RESPOND

1. What was this woman's response to Jesus' compassion towards her?
2. How does this passage make you reflect on your response to Jesus' compassion towards you? How does it encourage you to worship him?

PRAY

As you end, think through your response to Jesus' kindness towards you. Thank God for his kindness and think through how he might lead you to proclaim his goodness to others.

NOTES

Thursday, July 27

Read 1 John 1:5-10

Now take a moment to read back through the *Life Together* excerpt we studied on Monday:

“Confess your faults one to another” (Jas. 5:16). He who is alone with his sin is utterly alone. It may be that Christians, notwithstanding corporate worship, common prayer, and all their fellowship in service, may still be left to their loneliness. The final break-through to fellowship does not occur, because, though they have fellowship with one another as believers and as devout people, they do not have fellowship as the undevout, as sinners. The pious fellowship permits no one to be a sinner. So everybody must conceal his sin from himself and from the fellowship. We dare not be sinners. Many Christians are unthinkably horrified when a real sinner is suddenly discovered among the righteous. So we remain alone with our sin, living in lies and hypocrisy. The fact is that we are sinners!

But it is the grace of the Gospel, which is so hard for the pious to understand, that it confronts us with the truth and says: You are a sinner, a great, desperate sinner; now come, as the sinner that you are, to God who loves you. He wants you as you are; He does not want anything from you, a sacrifice, a work; He wants

you alone. “My son, give me thine heart” (Prov. 23.26). God has come to you to save the sinner. Be glad! This message is liberation through truth. You can hide nothing from God. The mask you wear before men will do you no good before Him. He wants to see you as you are, He wants to be gracious to you. You do not have to go on lying to yourself and your brothers, as if you were without sin; you can dare to be a sinner. - Page 110-111

RESPOND

1. What does 1 John 1:5-10 have to say about confessing your sins?
2. Looking back over Bonhoeffer’s thoughts, how does confessing your sins lead to fellowship with God?

PRAY

Confessing your sin and acknowledging it both to God and to others is daunting, but we read in 1 John 1 that the promises of walking in light far surpass the trails of confession. Close your time by asking God for help in bringing your sin to light. Think through the ways you need to grow in confessing your sins to other believers, and ask the Lord to help you.

Friday, July 28

Read Romans 2:4

RESPOND

- 1. How does Romans 2:4 exemplify Jesus' interaction with the woman at the well in John 4?
- 2. In what ways do you need to grow in your response to God's kindness?

PRAY

Pray that God would help you repent of anything you've been holding back from him. Pray that he would help you respond to his kindness faithfully. Consider again how you can grow in confessing your sin to others and continue to pray that God would produce growth in you.

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WEEK EIGHT

CONFESSION AND COMMUNITY *part three*

Monday, July 31

Read 1 John 1:5-10, then read this excerpt from *Life Together*:

Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God? But if we do, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution... Who can give us the certainty that, in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses

his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person.

- Page 115-116

RESPOND

1. What are your initial thoughts about Bonhoeffer's comments? Do you find it easier to confess your sins to God rather than another believer? If so, why do you think that is?
2. Both 1 John and this excerpt from Bonhoeffer talk about the lies of sin. How does confessing your sin help break sin's deception?

PRAY

End your time by praying for your week. Pray that God would move in your life as you study his word. Pray that the time you spend studying his word would be productive for you.

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Tuesday, August 1

Read Luke 17:11-19

RESPOND

1. Why did only one leper turn around and give thanks to Jesus?
2. How is this story a picture of the Gospel?

PRAY

Take a moment to think through how Jesus has brought healing into your life. Pray that you would be marked by thankfulness for how Jesus has loved you. If you're waiting on God to bring healing to your life in some way, pray that he would heal you and that he would increase your faith as you wait on him.

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Wednesday, August 2

Read Psalm 32

RESPOND

1. How did David's silence over his sin compare to his confession??
2. How does confessing your sin help you "be glad in the Lord, and rejoice"?

PRAY

Close your time by praying that God would reveal to you any areas of sin that you need to confess. Pray for strength in confronting these areas. Pray also that God would help you see him as a hiding place, a place of safety.

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Thursday, August 3

First, read 2 Corinthians 4:4-6. Then, look back over the Bonhoeffer quote we studied on Monday:

Why is it that it is often easier for us to confess our sins to God than to a brother? God is holy and sinless, He is a just judge of evil and the enemy of all disobedience. But a brother is sinful as we are. He knows from his own experience the dark night of secret sin. Why should we not find it easier to go to a brother than to the holy God? But if we do, we must ask ourselves whether we have not often been deceiving ourselves with our confession of sin to God, whether we have not rather been confessing our sins to ourselves and also granting ourselves absolution... Who can give us the certainty that, in the confession and the forgiveness of our sins, we are not dealing with ourselves but with the living God? God gives us this certainty through our brother. Our brother breaks the circle of self-deception. A man who confesses

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his sins in the presence of a brother knows that he is no longer alone with himself; he experiences the presence of God in the reality of the other person. – *Life Together*, Page 115-116

RESPOND

1. How does sin blind us to the light of Jesus? Look back at your study from Monday regarding the deception of sin.
2. Why should we persevere in confessing and laying aside our sin? Why does God desire this for us?

PRAY

Pray that God would help you “lay aside every weight and sin which hangs so closely.” (Hebrews 12:1) Ask that he would strengthen you in your fight against sin, and that he would give you the courage to confess your sins to others as you pursue obedience. Think back to your study last week, and continue to think about other believers to whom you can confess your sin, if you haven’t already done so.

Friday, August 4

Read James 5:16. So far we've studied this verse multiple times, but the implications of James' teaching here are incredibly relevant to our pursuit of obedience and thankfulness to God.

RESPOND

1. How does confession lead to healing in our lives? How does this produce thankfulness in us?
2. How does confession help us encourage others in their faith?

PRAY

Close by praying that God would increase your faith and help you walk in obedience to his word. Pray that he would use you to encourage and strengthen other believers in your community. Pray that he would use others to do the same for you.

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WEEK NINE

THE COMMUNITY FOR OTHERS

Monday, August 7

First, read Philippians 2:1-11.

Now, read this excerpt from a letter Bonhoeffer wrote while he was in prison:

“The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.” – Letters and Papers from Prison, page 382

RESPOND

1. How does Jesus embody what it means to “count others more significant than yourselves”?
2. Look at verse 5. How are we able to have the same mind as Jesus in his focus on others?

PRAY

Close by asking God to help you attend his word this week, that he would prepare your heart for what he might say to you through his word, and that you would be receptive to him. Ask for his help as you follow Jesus and try to “count others as more significant than [yourself]”.

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Tuesday, August 8

Read Luke 9:23-27

RESPOND

1. This passage hits home on one idea: surrendering your entire life to Jesus. How does this help us understand what it means to follow Jesus?
2. Are there areas of your life that you find difficult to surrender to God? Which ones, and why do you think that's the case?

PRAY

End your time by praying for faith. Pray that God would help you surrender your entire life to him and “take up your cross daily”.

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Wednesday, August 9

Start out by reading Galatians 6:1-2.

Now, read back over the excerpt from Bonhoeffer’s letter that we studied on Monday:

“The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others.” – *Letters and Papers from Prison*, page 382

RESPOND

1. What exactly does it mean to “bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ”?
2. In what ways do you struggle doing this?

PRAY

Close by praying for God’s help as you bear the burdens of others, and offer your burdens to them. Pray that he would help you see your need for other believers, and that he would grow you how he wishes.

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Thursday, August 10

Read Colossians 3:12-17

RESPOND

1. This scripture is a commandment; we're told by God to put on compassionate hearts, bear with one another, and to let the word of Christ dwell in us richly. In what ways do you need to grow in obeying these commandments?
2. How do we obey this scripture out of love for God, without resorting to legalism?

PRAY

Pray that God would help you trust in the finished work of his son Jesus, knowing that you don't have to please him with your obedience. Pray that God would help you respond to his grace in love and that you would grow in your obedience to him out of that love.

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Friday, August 11

Read Philippians 2:1-11 again.

Now, one last time, read back over the excerpt from Bonhoeffer's prison letter:

"The Church is the Church only when it exists for others...not dominating, but helping and serving. It must tell men of every calling what it means to live for Christ, to exist for others." – *Letters and Papers from Prison*, page 382

Take time to reflect on what you have learned from this study, specifically about what it means to need fellow believers. Use the space below to recall how God has grown you over the past nine weeks, and think through how God is calling you to continue growing after this study is finished.

PRAY

End by praying that God would use believers in your life to redirect you again and again to Jesus, that you would do the same for them, and that together God would build his church up into the image of his Son.

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