# life together

by deitrich bonhoeffer · Language: EN

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## Overview

Life Together, written by Dietrich Bonhoeffer in 1938, is a classic Christian devotional and theological reflection on the nature and practice of Christian community. Drawing from his experience leading an underground seminary in Finkenwalde, Germany, during the Nazi era, Bonhoeffer argues that true Christian community is not an ideal to be achieved but a gift from God, made possible through Jesus Christ. The book explores the spiritual disciplines that sustain such community, including daily prayer, Scripture reading, worship, confession, and mutual service. Bonhoeffer emphasizes that Christians are called to live together not because they are naturally compatible, but because they are united in Christ, and this unity must be expressed in concrete, practical ways.

The book is structured around the rhythms of a day in a Christian community, from morning prayers to evening fellowship, and it addresses both the blessings and the challenges of communal life. Bonhoeffer warns against the dangers of emotionalism, individualism, and the 'wish dream' of an ideal community that often leads to disappointment and disillusionment. Instead, he calls believers to accept one another as they are, to serve one another in humility, and to practice the discipline of silence and the ministry of listening. He also stresses the importance of private confession and the Lord's Supper as means of grace that sustain the community.

Life Together matters because it offers a profound and practical vision of Christian fellowship that remains relevant in an age of isolation and division. Bonhoeffer's insights on community, service, and spiritual discipline have inspired countless Christians, and the book is considered a spiritual classic. It challenges readers to move beyond superficial notions of community and to embrace the costly grace of living together in Christ, even in the midst of a hostile world. The book's enduring appeal lies in its combination of theological depth, pastoral wisdom, and practical guidance for everyday Christian living.

## Key Takeaways

- Christian community is a gift from God, not an ideal to be achieved; it is rooted in Jesus Christ and not in shared interests or personalities.
- Beware of the 'wish dream' of an ideal community; it leads to disappointment and undermines genuine fellowship.

• Practice the ministry of listening: truly hearing another person is a service of love that builds community.

• Daily prayer and Scripture reading are essential disciplines for sustaining Christian community.

• Confession of sins to a brother or sister is a means of grace that breaks the power of sin and restores fellowship.

• Serve others in practical, humble ways, even in the small tasks of daily life, for Christ's sake.

• Silence is not a withdrawal from community but a discipline that prepares the heart for God's Word and for others.

• The Lord's Supper is the climax of Christian community, where believers are united in the body of Christ.

## Chapter Summaries

### Community

Bonhoeffer opens by affirming that Christian community is not a human ideal but a divine reality. It is a gift of God, made possible through Jesus Christ, who has reconciled believers to God and to one another. He warns against the 'wish dream' of an ideal community, which leads to disappointment and disillusionment. Instead, Christians are called to accept one another as they are, in their sinfulness and weakness, and to see each other as brothers and sisters in Christ. True community is found not in shared feelings or experiences but in the objective reality of Christ's work.

### The Day with Others

This chapter outlines the rhythm of a day in Christian community, beginning with morning prayer and Scripture reading. Bonhoeffer emphasizes the importance of common prayer and the singing of hymns, which unite believers in praise. He also discusses the practice of intercessory prayer, where believers bring the needs of the whole community before God. The day is to be lived in the presence of God, with work and rest sanctified by prayer. Bonhoeffer stresses that the day should end with evening thanksgiving and a commitment to the coming day.

### The Day Alone

Bonhoeffer argues that solitude is essential for Christian community. Without time alone with God, one cannot truly be with others. He discusses the disciplines of personal meditation on Scripture, prayer, and intercession. He warns against the dangers of busyness and the neglect of one's own spiritual life. The day alone is not a retreat from community but a preparation for it, as one encounters God personally and is then able to serve others. He also addresses the practice of silence, which is not emptiness but a listening to God's Word.

### The Ministry of the Community

This chapter describes the various ministries that believers exercise toward one another. The first is the ministry of holding one's tongue, which involves refraining from harmful speech and practicing restraint. The second is the ministry of meekness, which is the willingness to serve others in humility. The third is the ministry of listening, which is a concrete act of love. The fourth is the ministry of helpfulness, which includes bearing the burdens of others. The fifth is the ministry of bearing, which means tolerating the weaknesses and sins of others. Finally, the ministry of proclaiming God's Word to one another is the highest service.

**Confession and the Lord's Supper**

Bonhoeffer discusses the practice of private confession, where believers confess their sins to a brother or sister. He argues that confession breaks the power of sin and brings forgiveness and healing. It is a means of grace that restores fellowship and humility. He also reflects on the Lord's Supper, which is the climax of Christian community. In the sacrament, believers are united with Christ and with one another. The Lord's Supper is a foretaste of the heavenly banquet and a source of strength for daily living. Bonhoeffer emphasizes that confession and the Lord's Supper are gifts of God that sustain the community.

## Themes

- Christian community
- Spiritual disciplines
- Service and humility
- Confession and forgiveness
- The centrality of Christ
- Solitude and silence

## Notable Quotes

- "The person who loves their dream of community will destroy community, but the person who loves those around them will create community." — From the opening chapter on community, warning against the 'wish dream' of an ideal fellowship.
- "God hates visionary dreaming; it makes the dreamer proud and pretentious." — In the chapter on community, discussing the dangers of idealizing community.
- "The first service that one owes to others in the fellowship consists in listening to them." — From the chapter on the ministry of the community, emphasizing the importance of listening.
- "Sin demands to have a man by himself. It withdraws him from the community." — From the chapter on confession, explaining how sin isolates the individual.
- "In confession the breakthrough to community takes place." — From the chapter on confession and the Lord's Supper, highlighting the communal aspect of confession.

• "The day with others is the day of the church, the day alone is the day of the individual." — From the chapter on the day alone, contrasting communal and personal devotion.

## Frequently Asked Questions

**What is life together about?**

Life Together is a Christian classic by Dietrich Bonhoeffer that explores the nature and practice of Christian community. Based on his experience leading an underground seminary in Nazi Germany, Bonhoeffer argues that true community is a gift from God, rooted in Christ, and sustained by spiritual disciplines like prayer, Scripture reading, confession, and mutual service. It offers practical guidance for living in fellowship with other believers.

**Is life together worth reading?**

Yes, Life Together is widely considered a spiritual classic and is highly recommended for Christians seeking a deeper understanding of community. It is short, profound, and practical, offering timeless wisdom on how to live in fellowship with others. Bonhoeffer's insights are particularly relevant in an age of individualism and isolation, making it a valuable read for both personal growth and group study.

**How does life together end?**

Spoiler: The book ends with a chapter on confession and the Lord's Supper, emphasizing that these are the means by which Christian community is sustained and renewed. Bonhoeffer concludes that the Lord's Supper is the climax of fellowship, where believers are united with Christ and with one another. The book ends on a note of hope, pointing to the eternal community that awaits believers in God's kingdom.

**Who should read life together?**

Life Together is ideal for Christians who are part of a church, small group, or any form of communal life, as well as those seeking to understand the biblical basis for fellowship. It is also valuable for pastors, ministry leaders, and anyone interested in spiritual formation. Its practical wisdom applies to all believers, regardless of denomination, and it is often used in seminary courses and discipleship programs.

**How long does it take to read life together?**

Life Together is a short book, typically around 120 pages. At an average reading speed of 250 words per minute, it would take approximately 2 to 3 hours to read. However, many readers prefer to read it slowly, reflecting on each chapter and applying its teachings, which could extend the reading time over several days or weeks.