

Life Together – Looking at Small Group Bible Study through the Lens of Bonhoeffer

- 1) Share a brief description of your group and the general, spiritual goal for your group
- 2) Brief bio of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and how this little book came into being...
- 3) Worship – sharing in the African American tradition: sacred, spiritual space and singing out

*“For you have not come to what may be touched, a blazing fire and darkness and gloom and a tempest and the sound of a trumpet and a voice whose words made the hearers beg that no further messages be spoken to them.... But you have come to Mount Zion and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to innumerable angels in festal gathering, and to the assembly of the firstborn who are enrolled in heaven, and to God, the judge of all, and to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, and to Jesus, the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.... [N]ow he has promised, ‘Yet once more I will shake not only the earth but also the heavens.’ This phrase, ‘Yet once more,’ indicates the removal of things that are shaken-- that is, things that have been made-- in order that the things that cannot be shaken may remain. Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe, for our God is a consuming fire.
“Let brotherly love continue....” – Hebrews 12:18-13:1*

If it Had not Been

[Chorus:] If It Had, Not, Been, For The Lord, On My Side
Tell Me Where - Would I Be? Where Would I Be?
If It Had Not Been For The Lord On My Side
Tell Me Where - Would I Be? Where Would I Be?

[Verse 1:] He Kept My Enemies Away
He Let The Sun Shine Though A Cloudy Day
Oh, He Wrapped Me In The Cradle Of His Arms
When He Knew I' Been Battered And Torn,

[Chorus]

- 4) The privilege and gift of Christian Community

Psalm 133:1 “Behold how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity.”

“It is not simply to be taken for granted that the Christian has the privilege of living among other Christians. Jesus Christ lived in the midst of his enemies. At the end, all his disciples deserted him. On the Cross he was utterly alone surrounded by evil-doers and mockers. For this cause he had come, to bring peace to the enemies of God. So the Christian, too, belongs not in the seclusion of the cloistered life but in the thick of the foes.... So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians.... to share God’s word and sacrament. Not all Christians receive this blessing. The imprisoned, the sick, the scattered lonely, the proclaimers of the Gospel in heathen lands stand alone....,” pp. 17-18

Christian community is like the gift of justification, in that we cannot create it or obtain it by ourselves. It is a work done by Christ and applied to us as a living and eternal reality. Christ unites us to one another and is the Mediator between us and God and between us and one another. Like our salvation, our Christian community or brotherhood is certain and lasting – and we must live in it as such. Like we “work out our faith with fear and trembling,” we work out the certainty of our Christian community with fear and trembling.

“Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus, who, though he was in the form of God, did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped, but emptied himself, by taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men. And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father. Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure. Do all things without grumbling or disputing, that you may be blameless and innocent, children of God (Phi 2:5-15 ESV)

- 5) Establishing community & Maintaining it – Confessing who Christ is and who we are before Him
James 5:16: “Confess your sins one to another and pray for each other

“Just as love to God begins with listening to his word, so the beginning of love for the brethren is listening to them.... Brotherly pastoral care is essentially distinguished from preaching by the fact that added to the task of speaking the word, there is the obligation of listening. There is a kind of listening with half an ear that presumes already to know what the other person has to say. It is an impatient, inattentive listening, that despises our brother and is only waiting for a change to speak.... That is no fulfillment of our obligation and it is certain that here, too, our attitude toward our brother only reflects our relationship to God. It is little wonder that we are no longer capable of the greatest service that God has committed to us – that of hearing our brother’s confession.

“... Christians have forgotten that the ministry of listening has been committed to them by Him who is Himself the great listener and whose work we should share. We should listen with the ears of God so that we make speak the Word of God...” p. 98

Primarily that: “You are forgiven in Christ’s name,” ushering them into joy, belonging and light

- 6) Break into groups of three to discuss, then come back together to share thoughts or questions:
- 1) What makes publically confessing sin to a person in your small group easy or hard? What makes it easy in a group like Alcoholics Anonymous? What contributes to it happening or not happening in your small group?
 - 2) How might you foster an opportunity for this to happen? What could you alter about the structure of your group that allows for this joy? This basic Christian reality and experience?