

Pre-work for Session 3

1. Read “Live the Gospel: Life Together,” starting on page 14.
2. Read “Rhythms” from *Community* by Brad House.
3. What stood out to you from the chapter?

4. How did this chapter help you think about the time a CG spends together outside formal discussion time?

5. How do you want to grow in sharing your life with others?

6. What questions did this chapter leave you with?



Live the Gospel: Life Together

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a pastor in Germany at the height of Nazi power. The Regime had taken control of the state-run church to help support their ideology with religious rhetoric, and most faithful Christians had fled the country or gone into hiding. However, Bonhoeffer and some of his contemporaries stayed in Germany (or in Bonhoeffer's case, returned to Germany) to set up secret seminaries in order to train pastors for ministry in the midst of a war-torn society. While running these seminaries Bonhoeffer wrote a summary text of how to accomplish the same kind of seminary elsewhere, published under the title *Life Together*.

This brief background should help us understand a crucial underpinning of Bonhoeffer's work; for him, Christian community was utterly vital to living a faithful Christian life. He was hiding out with fellow believers confronted with the real risk of losing their lives for the sake of staying faithful to Christ. This threat made precious to him what many of us take for granted; "It is grace, nothing but grace, that we are allowed to live in community with Christian brethren."¹

If we're honest, many of us believe Christian community is less of a grace from God and more of a perk, an obligation, or even a burden. Here in modern-day America we tend to treat community as a source for meeting our own ends, to give *me* company, acceptance, accolades, or benefits. We can try to climb our social environment like a ladder; we can treat our neighbors like extras in our life's movie; we can fear others as a liability on our happiness. Today's American disposition is, on the whole, contrary to Christian community.

Reflecting back to week one and our Biblical summary of community we can easily see these American assumptions for what they are: a false gospel. Much of our cultural context would tell us community really exists to serve our own purposes, but Christians follow a savior who "came not to be served but to serve." (Mark 10:45) Our social environment is characterized by surrounding yourself with those who agree with you and shunning those who don't; Christians walk the hard road of clinging faithfully to Christ while loving and praying for their enemies. (Matt. 5:44) And while the American Dream preaches self-sufficiency as a virtue, Christians believe that God supplies for our deepest needs in the midst of our weakness. (2 Cor. 8:9)

¹ Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together*, 20



One of these deep-set needs is the need for one another. The Christian is dependent on other Christians for encouragement and support, for being built up in the faith, and being reminded of the loveliness of Christ through the Word. Bonhoeffer captures this need for one another in *Life Together*:

God has put the Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of man. Therefore, 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 bringers of the message of salvation.²

What Bonhoeffer captures here, and what we see in the pages of Scripture, is a freeing truth: on your own you are insufficient. This is the core truth of the Gospel: Jesus lived the life you couldn't live and died the death you deserved. But rather than wallowing in the sorrow of our insufficiency, we get to rejoice that God has supplied everything we need for life. (2 Pet. 1:3) Part of this supply is the body of Christ, who is fit together so that we, as a whole, grow up in health and love. (Eph. 4:16)

Spending time together in and outside our regular group gatherings will, quite obviously, take time, which is a precious commodity in our society. It will take prioritization, problem solving, and putting others before yourself. It will also take grace, knowing that the forgiveness we have in Christ extends to the times we fail in Christian community. While no good thing in life comes

² Bonhoeffer, 22-23



without effort, we Christians get to rejoice that the real effort of making believers into a new family has already been done by Christ:

Because God has already laid the foundation of our fellowship, because God has bound us together in one body with other Christians in Jesus Christ, long before we entered into common life with them, we enter into that common life not as demanders but as thankful recipients. We thank God for what he has done for us. We thank God for giving us brethren who live by His call, but His forgiveness, and His promise. We do not complain of what God does not give us; we rather thank God for what He does give us daily.³

³ Bonhoeffer, 28



Session 3: Live the Gospel

SHARING OUR LIVES INSIDE AND OUTSIDE THE REGULAR GATHERING

Session 2 Recap

- We study scripture because it is breathed out by God and works to complete our faith.
(2 Timothy 3:16-17)
- Why do we do discussion instead of teaching a lesson?

Session 3 Discussion

What do we mean by “share your life”?

Why share your life?

Call of scripture – Acts 2:42-47, Romans 12:1-21

Love one another in your:

- _____
- _____
- _____
- _____

Resist worldliness



How is this different from a classic Bible study?

How do we go about this in community groups?

Reading: “Rhythms” from Brad House’s *Community*

How do we do this in a way that welcomes doubters, seekers, and followers?

>>Next week: “Spaces”

