

LIFE TOGETHER

A STUDY GUIDE

To accompany

*Life Together: The Classic Exploration of
Faith in Community*

By Dietrich Bonhoeffer

(Translated and with an Introduction by John W. Doberstein)

**Study One in The Ekklesia Project's
Going Deeper Series**

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Welcome to this study! You are about to begin an important journey as, together with others from your congregation, you consider the nature and practice of Christian life and discipleship in light of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's *Life Together*.

It is my intent and hope that this study guide will offer a fresh means to engage the classic *Life Together*, while also providing a fresh means for engaging one another in recovering practices of Christian discipleship in your congregation. Jim Wallis in *The Call to Conversion* says, "The greatest need of our time is for *koinonia*, the call simply to be the church, to love one another, and to offer our lives for the sake of the world. The creation of living, breathing, loving communities of faith at the local church level is the foundation of all the other answers" (p.109). As the various forces of the modern world school us in the values of freedom, individualism, self-reliance, and self-advancement, the church is called to form a people with different practices, different patterns of thinking and behaving, different "habits of the heart." That is what this book and your study time will be about.

This study guide is a resource meant to bring Bonhoeffer's text into conversation with biblical texts, with the "text" of your own congregation's unfolding story, and with the "text" of your own life. I hope you will see this journey as a rich opportunity for spiritual renewal and communal formation. Open yourself to receive the gift of life together that Christians share. May it become a fresh and vital force in your daily life and witness.

Dale Ziemer
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SESSION 1:
INTRODUCTION

The nature of our journey together

It is important at the outset of any journey to explore where we are headed and how we will get there. To that end, “covenanting together” around the goals of this study, expectations, and group norms will be helpful. Read these together. Use the questions that follow for entering into this learning journey together.

GOALS of this study process:

As a result of this study journey you can expect to—

1. Develop a greater understanding of the nature, purpose, and practice of Christian discipleship in community.
2. Participate in Christian community through the practices of study, conversation, prayer, and worship.
3. Begin to envision how you – and your local church – can grow in discipleship and Christian witness.

Realistic Expectations

As you participate in this study journey you can realistically expect to –

1. Work in a variety of groupings for study and discussion – alone, sometimes working with just one other person, but mostly as a study group together.
2. Consider what is involved in Christian community, testing your own notions and understandings.
3. Reflect upon the practices and habits of your own congregation in light of what you are reading.
4. Feel confused and frustrated part of the time.
5. Enjoy one another and the perspectives each person brings.
6. Share with one another and draw on one another’s thoughts, experiences, and insights.
7. Be challenged to grow in your understanding and practice of Christian discipleship in community.
8. Think, ponder, reflect, make notes of your learnings.

Group norms

Our life together during the time of this study will be enriched if we identify and observe some key norms or ground rules. Let us declare that it is OK – and even desirable to –

1. Participate in every session of this study.
2. Get up, move around as needed during the sessions.
3. Take responsibility for our own learning – digging in, asking questions.
4. Formulate ideas often by thinking out loud, and share ideas even if they are not fully formed. This will help others to share their thoughts as well.
5. Invite others to respond to our thoughts and join with us in shaping them.
6. Listen actively to others. This will let them know that their contribution is taken seriously, and it will help us to gain from their insights.
7. Build on the ideas, images, and insights of others – and give them credit for it.
8. Disagree, argue honestly but lovingly with one another.
9. Be open to the movement of the Holy Spirit among us to inspire and illuminate.
10. Treat this study as a wonderful and unique opportunity for spiritual growth – a chance to think and pray together and to clarify our thoughts about what God wants to do through us, the church.
11. Enjoy one another!

Design of this Study

- | | |
|------------|--|
| Session 1: | INTRODUCTION |
| Session 2: | CHAPTER ONE: Community |
| Session 3: | CHAPTER TWO: The Day with Others |
| Session 4: | CHAPTER THREE: The Day Alone |
| Session 5: | CHAPTER FOUR: Ministry |
| Session 6: | CHAPTER FIVE: Confession and Communion |
| Session 7: | BRINGING IT ALL TOGETHER |

Format

You are invited to work as a group and plan the way in which you will use this study resource. Each session includes:

1. **Entering In** – Provides for “checking in” with each other at the start of each session and for beginning with prayer. Entering in invites the group to connect with one another around a biblical text to enrich its understanding and practice of Christian community.
2. **Exploring Life Together** – Provides an Introduction to the theme of the study. Lists Main Ideas from the chapter in *Life Together*. Provides Questions for Reflection and Discussion to enable participants to interact with each other exploring implications from their reading and study of *Life Together*.

Entering In

Working as a group, use the following questions for reflection and discussion as you begin this study together:

1. Why did you say yes to this study group?
2. What excites you about this journey? What are you curious about?
3. As you read through the Goals, Norms, Design, and Format, what catches your attention? What stimulates a question?
4. Why is it important for Christians to be intentional about discipleship? About Christian community? About Bible study? What have been some of your experiences with these?

Exploring Life Together

Introduction (*Life Together*, p.7-13)

Without question the social, cultural, and political context in which *Life Together* was written is compelling. The Introduction to *Life Together* makes this clear in a brief summary of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's life and work. Read this summary together.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

Answer these questions together as a group.

1. As you read Doberstein's introduction of *Life Together*, what strikes you most about the life and witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer?
2. Bonhoeffer's life and martyrdom took place in a specific context. He was aware of and deeply realistic about the challenges that his context presented for an authentic and credible Gospel witness. Name some aspects of your church's context for ministry today (consider the social, cultural, political, economic context, as well as the local setting).
3. In what ways does your context provide a challenge for ministry?

In what ways does your context provide opportunity for ministry?

SESSION 2:
COMMUNITY

Christianity means community through Jesus Christ and in Jesus Christ. No Christian community is more or less than this. Whether it be a brief, single encounter or daily fellowship of years, Christian community is only this. We belong to one another only through and in Jesus Christ. (p.21)

Entering In

Bible Study: God's Own People

I Peter 2:9-10

The first letter of Peter was written to give encouragement and hope to Christians who were undergoing persecution. The letter shows how Christians who thought of themselves as “exiles” within their own society drew upon images that had long provided a sense of peoplehood for Israel (see Exodus 19:1-6). Now they are invited to discover the source of their identity in these same images as a way of expressing their own consciousness and continuity as a community.

Read I Peter 2:9-10

1. How are Christians addressed at the very beginning of this passage? What does this say about the author's understanding of the Christian community?
2. How do you respond to the assertion that as a Christian you are part of “a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation?”
3. What, from this text, is the Christian community called to do?

4. How have Christians been constituted as (created, built into) “God’s own people?”

Exploring Life Together

Community (*Life Together*, pp.17-39)

From 1935 to 1937 Dietrich Bonhoeffer served as pastor, administrator, and teacher at an underground seminary at Finkenwalde, Germany (now Poland). Bonhoeffer insisted that if seminarians were to learn about and lead within the Christian community – the church – they must also enter into and learn the practical disciplines of the Christian faith in community. This led to the formation of a “community house” where those involved in seminary education would share “life together”. In setting up this community house, Bonhoeffer put into practice the conviction that the renewal of the church depends upon recovering communal practices of Christian obedience that would be shared by members of the community, and rediscovering the Bible-in-community as the primary source for Christian discipleship. At Finkenwalde, Bonhoeffer invited students and all involved in their education into a “life together” marked by intentional practices that cultivated a shared life of discipleship. The book, *Life Together*, records Bonhoeffer’s learnings from that experiment.¹

Bonhoeffer clearly recognized that the life together of a congregation was different than the life together of a group of seminarians and their teachers. However, he thought there should be significant overlap between these two spheres, especially in regard to worship and prayer. Spiritual exercises that sustain seminarians, Bonhoeffer believed, are the same as those which sustain church members in their ministry and witness.

The likely context for this study in your congregation is North America in the early 21st century; thus, the place and time are different. But the mission of the church is still to be found in God’s mission. God, who is always doing “a new thing” (Isaiah 43:19), calls the church to discern, celebrate, and

FOOTNOTES:

¹ This brief overview is adapted from Michael G. Cartwright, “Life Together at Finkenwalde: An Introduction” in his study guide created for the Western PA Conference UMC, 1993.

participate in God's mission afresh and anew in every time and place. The church, therefore, is called to bring the good news of the kingdom into engagement with the deep yearnings and concrete challenges of its worldly context. But to engage today's context with the good news requires the formation of a disciple community – the faithful body of Jesus Christ – that not only proclaims but also embodies the Good News. In many churches this requires a radically new vision, new ways of thinking, and new patterns of behavior.

Life Together offers a fresh and faithful vision for the life of discipleship in community. A key question for this study is **“What would this vision and practice of Christian discipleship in community look like here if we took seriously the call of the Gospel in our context today?”**

Main Ideas

- The visible, face-to-face living together of Christians is a privilege by the grace of God. The companionship of a fellow Christian is the physical sign of the gracious presence of Christ. This is a source of great thanksgiving and praise to God.
- Christians need one another. We seek and find God's living Word only in the witness of another. The goal of all Christian community is this: To meet one another as bringers of the message of salvation
- In Christ, Christians belong to one another. This is a divine reality and not dependent upon experience. We are bound to one another because of what God has done for us in Jesus Christ, not because of shared interests or like-mindedness or common experiences.
- Christian community is not some extraordinary social experience, some ideal religious fellowship. It is a divine reality.
- Our periodic disillusionment with the Christian fellowship is actually an important crisis. It is a beginning point for the fellowship to become what it is by God's gift and promise.
- Christian community is not an ideal which we must work to realize; it is rather a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate. It is a spiritual reality (created by the Holy Spirit) not a psychic [human] reality (coming from our own natural urges, powers, and capacities).
- Relationships within the Christian community involve setting the other free from my control, free to be what they are in Christ. Not the image I would desire for them but the true image they bear as Christ's own.

- It is not the experience of Christian community that is primary, but solid and certain faith in the God who calls Christian community into existence for God's purposes. The Christian community is bound together by faith, not by experience.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. The first chapter begins by pointing to the privilege and gift of living in visible fellowship with each other.

Would you agree that “the physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer”? If so, what makes it so? If not, why not? Give an example.

What difference does it make to start our discussion of Christian community by asserting its primary nature as a *gift of God's grace*?

2. Bonhoeffer describes his vision of Christian community in this chapter. It is a community “through and in Jesus Christ.” Apart from Christ, it does not exist and has no purpose. As a group look at the section p.21-26.

Why do Christians need one another?

What is the goal of all Christian community?

What does it mean to say “a Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ”?

From your reading, what are we asserting when we say we belong to one another as brothers and sisters in Christ? What is the scope of

this belonging? On what is it based? What does it include? Or not include?

3. Bonhoeffer stays “close to the ground” in his description of the “life together” of a congregation or community of faith. He knew very well how difficult it is to maintain community life in a congregation.

Recall a time of disillusionment in the life of your congregation. What happened? What were the effects?

Drawing upon Bonhoeffer’s thinking, how might an experience of disillusionment with the Christian community actually be an important and needed crisis?

How can it be true that daily thankfulness for Christian fellowship – even where there is no great experience – is actually the means by which the fellowship grows?

What difference does it make to say that “Christian brotherhood [community] is not an ideal which we must realize,” but is rather “a reality created by God in Christ in which we may participate.” (p.30)?

SESSION 3:
THE DAY WITH OTHERS

At the threshold of the new day stands the Lord who made it.
 (p.48)

Entering In

Bible Study: The New Community

Acts 2:37-47

The coming of the Holy Spirit on Pentecost is recorded in Acts 2. The Holy Spirit comes upon the disciples as a gift from God (vv.1-13). Peter then boldly interprets what has happened by appealing to the Scriptures, and calls the hearers to repentance (v. 14-36). The result (vv.37-47) is a unique quality and pattern of life together that is transformative for those who participate in it, and conspicuous to those who observe from the outside.

Read **Acts 2: 37-47**

1. How is the new community formed?

2. Describe the shape of the life of the new community in Acts. With what activities does the new community of faith involve itself?

3. What elements of the life of your congregation relate to the description given in Acts 2?

Exploring Life Together

The Day with Others (*Life Together*, pp.40-75)

Bonhoeffer explains the rhythm of corporate prayer in this chapter for the “family fellowship” or seminary community. Many American Christians will find this description rather alien to their experience. Bonhoeffer is not proposing that congregations attempt to institute monastic models of daily

prayer; his intent, rather, is to help Christians understand what the apostolic teaching to pray “without ceasing” (I Thes.5:17) might mean. What is different and illuminating about Bonhoeffer’s discussion of such New Testament exhortations is that he focuses on their communal and holistic expressions and not simply on individualistic or piecemeal ones.

A number of corporate (communal, shared) practices are introduced in this chapter. Described with great care, each is presented with theological rationale and practical implications for the Christian fellowship. In some cases, Bonhoeffer takes great pains to correct a mistaken understanding or a particular obstacle encountered in his day and is quite detailed about it. To read and engage this chapter, then, is to enter into a very specific context in which the pattern of practices as a whole and in particular were to be lived out. It is written with the assumption that these practices are not to be understood as good ideas “in general,” but in fact are to take on specific shape in the church’s real circumstances.

Our goal in this study is to begin to discover the wisdom of the practices described here as a whole, and not necessarily to dwell on their original historical context. Taken together, these elements make up essential practices that constitute the Christian community as Christian community in and for the world. Each practice, individually and as a whole, forms the faith community into a particular way of understanding and living in relationship to God, each other, and the world.

The challenge for us therefore is not to linger long in Bonhoeffer’s arguments addressed to his specific situation, but to linger long enough to appreciate the need to indeed get specific about *our own* context. The opportunity is to consider how these practices might become intentional, communal, and thus life-giving and formative for the life and witness of Christian community in our own setting and circumstances.

Main Ideas

- The case for morning devotions lies in this assertion: The first thought and the first word of the day belong to God. It is at dawn when Christ rose in victory. Thus, the morning belongs to the church, the Christian family, and its rightful language is that of praise and adoration of the Triune God.
- The Psalter has a unique place in the devotional life of the church. The secret to the “difficult” texts in Psalms is to understand that even if a verse or psalm is not one’s own prayer, it is nevertheless the

prayer of another member of the fellowship in another time and place. Thus it is Jesus praying through the mouth and experience of his Body on earth, the church.

- Holy Scripture is more than a watchword, more than “light for today”; it is God’s word for all people for all times. What is missing in the church is an understanding of *the whole of Scripture*. Sound bites and the reading of isolated texts are not enough. Instead, the practice of “consecutive reading” allows the listening community to discover the whole story and to enter into it as its own.
- Only in Holy Scripture do we learn to understand reality correctly. For example, our life, our troubles, and guilt are only ever a part – not the whole – of reality. In the Scriptures we see the full reality, for there is our life, our troubles and guilt, *and* our salvation.
- Song – praise, thanksgiving, and prayer – is the voice of the church. Song has had this role through all ages and circumstances. In practice, it is a unique voice in that it joins individual voices together to speak and pray the same Word at the same time.
- Common prayer involves praying as a fellowship and in our own words. It is important for common prayer to reflect the real cares, needs, joys, thanksgivings, petitions, and hopes of the community. It is equally important for the community to support the praying brother or sister by making the prayer its own. The poorest mumbling utterance may be more faithful and edifying than the best-formulated prayer.
- Jesus keeps three kinds of table fellowship with us: daily fellowship at meals, table fellowship of the Lord’s Supper, and the final table fellowship in the Kingdom of God. Every one of these meals fills Christians with gratitude for the living and present Lord. It is never “my” daily bread, it is always “our” daily bread. Thus, it is not our prerogative to keep either our bread or our table for ourselves only. When Jesus joins those who eat together in his name, there are ethical implications.
- The entire day belongs to God. Within it there is a time for prayer and a time for work. “Work,” which takes up the bulk of the day, is given a sense of meaning and unity when it is done “in the name of the Lord Jesus.”

- The end of the day lends itself to prayer of intercession. Now we lay down the work of our hands and commit ourselves and one another into the hands of God with prayers for blessing, peace, and preservation. Evening prayer includes the petition of forgiveness for wrongs done, for readiness to forgive, and provides an occasion for reconciliation.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. This chapter describes the entire day with God and with others of the Christian community, beginning with rising in the morning and turning to God, to praying the Psalms, reading Scripture, singing, saying prayers together, table fellowship, daily work, and evening prayer.

What practices of devotion and prayer did you find new or entirely unfamiliar?

What practices described here are part of the ongoing life of your congregation?

Which practices are particularly difficult? Why is that so?

The day's beginning

2. “Morning does not belong to the individual, it belongs to the Church of the Triune God, to the Christian family...” Through history the church has been called to common praise of God in the early morning. Before the pressures of the day, ... “the first thought and the first word belong to him to whom our whole life belongs (p.42-43).”

How do you respond to Bonhoeffer’s assertions about the day’s beginning?

The secret of the Psalter

3. In their great variety the Psalms offer the full range of human experience expressed in prayer. We will find it very difficult to relate to some of the prayers expressed. Yet in opening ourselves to all of them, we open ourselves to Christ's own prayer expressed in the voice of the people of God through all times and circumstances.

What difficulty might people have in embracing the Psalms as the prayer book of the church? What help does Bonhoeffer provide?

Reading the Scriptures

4. Bonhoeffer recognized biblical illiteracy as a problem in the church of his time and place. This is why he stresses the importance of discovering the Scripture as a whole through the practice of "consecutive reading."

To what extent is biblical illiteracy a problem in the church today?

Look at pp. 53-54. Consider the image of the fellowship of believers being "woven into" the biblical stories. We are "torn out of our own existence and set down in the midst of the holy history of God on earth." (p.53). How is this possible? How is this similar to or different from how the Bible is understood in your church?

On p. 54 Bonhoeffer says, "a complete reversal occurs." What is the reversal he is talking about? In some ways he is describing a role reversal, perhaps, in which God is in the driver's seat instead of us. How do you respond? Why is this important when reading the Bible?

Singing the New Song

5. Singing together is a long, historic, Christian practice. It is also one around which there exists great differences and even conflict in some churches today.

Why do Christians sing when they are together, anyway?

What does it mean to say, “It is not you that sings, it is the Church that is singing, and you, as a member of the Church, may share in its song (p.61)”?

Saying our Prayers Together

6. Bonhoeffer envisions that the prayer of the Christian community really must be prayer that is “*our* word, *our* prayer for this day, for *our* work, for *our* fellowship, for the particular needs and sins that oppress *us* in common, for the persons who are committed to *our* care.” (p.62). It is really to become “common prayer.”

What would this kind of prayer look like and sound like?

If the prayer of the faith community were to become more the “common prayer of all” in your congregation, what would need to happen?

The Fellowship of the Table

7. In all three kinds of table fellowship (daily fellowship at table; the table fellowship of the Lord’s Supper; and the final table fellowship in the Kingdom of God) the key is that “their eyes were opened, and they knew him (Luke 24:30-31).” (p.66).

Why does it matter to know Christ’s presence during every day meals?

How does table fellowship bind Christians to their Lord and to one another? Share an example or story.

What is the obligation that is implied by the table fellowship of Christians?

The Day's Work

8. There is a time for prayer, and there is also a time for work. Bonhoeffer makes the claim for work as work – to lose oneself in a cause, in reality, the task (p.70).

What is the relationship between prayer and work?

Noonday and Evening

9. Two other times of day are given attention:

How is it that the Christian community can claim Noonday in particular as belonging to God? (p.72)

What might be an appropriate practice for the evening and close of day for the Christian congregation that seeks to live faithfully with God and one another?

SESSION 4:
THE DAY ALONE

Blessed is he who is alone in the strength of the fellowship and blessed is he who keeps the fellowship in the strength of aloneness. (p. 89)

Entering In

Bible Study: Belonging to One Another

I Thessalonians 1:1-5; 5:25-28

Paul addresses the Christians in I Thessalonians as “brothers and sisters” sixteen times. This intentional use of the *language of belonging* reminds these new Christian converts of their changed identity and the new set of relationships this change brings. Both their new identity and their relationships are bestowed by baptism into Christ and extend beyond their family of origin. They are invited in this letter to continue in their journey of transformation with encouragement such as this: “Now concerning love of brothers and sisters...you yourselves have been taught by God to love one another. ...But we urge you, brothers and sisters, to do so more and more” (4:9-10).

Read 1 Thess. 1:1-5

1. How does Paul regard the church at Thessalonica?
2. What are three significant indicators of the church’s identity mentioned in 1:4?

Read 1 Thess. 5:25-28

3. What does Paul ask the church to do?

4. How will these practices reinforce the identity they share in Christ?

For further discussion:

5. What language shapes the identity of those within your congregation?
6. What difference would practicing the language of *belonging* make?

Exploring Life Together

The Day Alone (*Life Together*, pp.76-89)

Chapter Three invites consideration of the devotional practices of meditation, prayer, and intercession. In our contemporary context, these three have a popularized aspect about them.

“Meditation” is not a possession of Christians alone. Every religion practices some form of meditation, and the Eastern approaches to meditation have taken the spotlight on the religious landscape of North America for several decades now. Books on meditation are plentiful, arising out of a wide range of religious traditions.

When polls are conducted about the spiritual practices of Americans, they typically indicate that Americans are a praying people. It is not clear at all what people mean by prayer and how they practice it. But most people claim to pray.

It is a common response when a friend or acquaintance has experienced illness, tragedy or grief, to say “I will keep you in my thoughts and prayers.” Is this intercession?

There is a distinctiveness about these practices for the Christian community that Bonhoeffer offers in this Chapter. Two qualities are distinctive in his understanding of the Christian’s “day alone.” First, what would seem at first glance as the “private” practice of devotion really is not. It is understood and

practiced rightly only within the context of a relationship to the Christian community. Second, it is related in practice and substance to the Scriptures. To miss the importance and centrality of these two relationships is to misunderstand the distinctive nature of the Christian devotional life.

The theological and practical guidance provided in this chapter has to do with the discipline of time apart – away from the rush of activities, relationships, noises and duties of daily life. It involves a defined time to let the Word of God dwell in us, to hold before God our own life in all of its particularity, and to intercede for those whom God has called us to care and pray for.

Main Ideas

- Living in community with others and being alone are parts of a whole cloth. “Only as we are within the fellowship can we be alone, and only he that is alone can live in the fellowship.” (p.77). There are practical pitfalls to wanting fellowship without the capacity for being alone, and in thinking that solitude can be fruitful without participating in the fellowship.
- The practice of silence is a “silence under the Word and silence that comes out of the Word.” Holding one’s tongue, ceasing conversation, and simple stillness under the Word of God are what Bonhoeffer has in mind.
- The Christian needs a fixed time when he or she can be alone during the day for Scripture meditation, prayer, and intercession.
- The purpose of meditation is to expose ourselves to the specific text “until it addresses us personally” (p.82). The goal is not to receive new ideas, but instead for the Word to penetrate and dwell “within us.” The *Word* is the active player in the Word/person encounter, not me. It seeks to “stir us, to work and operate in us . . . it will do its work in us” (pp.83-84) – even when we don’t feel or experience it.
- Christian prayer is response to God’s Word and promise. It is not prayer in general. It is the readiness and willingness to receive and appropriate the Word, to accept it in personal situations, particular tasks, decisions, sins, and temptations.

- Intercession is a matter of holding before God definite persons, definite difficulties, and therefore definite petitions. It is not general and vague. It is time-consuming. A congregation lives by the intercession of its members for one another, or it collapses.
- The real test of the integrity of our personal devotion is if it makes any difference in daily life – if it is so unrelated to the real workaday world, or if it leads to a real contact with God from which one emerges strengthened and purified. The test is in the day.
- The fellowship is “sundered and besmirched” or “strengthened and hallowed” by what one offers up in one’s solitude on its behalf. We are members of a body, not only when we choose to be, but in our whole existence.
- There is a close, reciprocal relationship between the Christian’s time alone and in community. Neither exists with any integrity without the other.

Questions for Reflection and Discussion

1. How does Bonhoeffer describe silence and solitude of the Christian life? Why is it important? How comfortable are you with solitude and silence? To what extent do you seek it? Or run from it? What is hard about it?

How does your congregation practice silence and solitude? What helps? What hinders? How might your congregation learn better to experience God’s presence and purpose in silence?

2. How is Scripture meditation (described here) related to and dependent on the practice of reading Scripture in the fellowship (described in chapter 2)?

What assumptions form the basis of Scripture meditation in the Day Alone?

For example:

- *The text has something personal to say to us as the church.*
- *The text has something personal to say for this day.*

And, what practical guidelines, reminders, or steps might be involved?

For example:

- *It is OK to stop on one word or phrase that catches our attention and ponder/probe it along with our reactions, feelings, and questions.*
- *Desire to discover how God wants the Word to enter into our lives, to stir us, or operate in us throughout the day.*
- *It is OK to be distracted by events, activities, duties, or people and to bring these thoughts into conversation with the text.*
- *Ask yourself, "What word, phrase, or question is to stand over the day today?"*

What obstacles block the way for claiming time and space for Scripture meditation?

3. What about intercession? What is it? Why is it an important practice for the Christian fellowship?

What practices of "praying for one another" have your congregation engaged in? How have you participated?

Imagine: What if a congregation took up the practice of intercession and prayed for one another daily? What difference would it make?

4. Bonhoeffer does not make the distinction between “gathered” and “scattered” church. Instead he offers a holistic vision of being church together – both when visibly present and apart from each other.

How do you understand our identity as “belonging to one another” even when we are not together? How are we still “community?”

How is such a community “good news” for the world?

SESSION 5:
MINISTRY

Then where the ministry of listening, active helpfulness, and bearing with others is faithfully performed, the ultimate and highest service can also be rendered, namely, the ministry of the Word of God. (p.108)

Entering In

Bible Study: The New Life in Christ

Romans 12:1-8

The Apostle Paul ends each of his letters with a section of very practical advice. He was not interested in abstract theological debate, but with the transformed daily lives of those who had found new life in Christ. It was his conviction that these lives had been transformed by their participation in the body of Christ. The ways and means of this new life do not fit easily into the values of the world. It involves a radical conversion—a transformation—from a self-centered to a Christ-centered life.

1. Have one member of the group read **Romans 12:1-8** out loud.
2. As the text is read, listen for particular words or images which stand out for you.
3. Briefly share around the group the words or images which caught your attention.
4. Have another member of the group read Romans 12:1-8 a second time.
5. As a group, consider the following questions.

What do you think Paul means by linking bodies, living sacrifice, and worship?

What does it mean to say “individually we are members one of another”?

Why do we need one another within the body of Christ (the church)?

Exploring Life Together

Ministry (*Life Together*, pp.90-109)

The vision of the community of faith in Chapter Four is one of "giftedness"-- active and involved communities filled with varieties of gifts, service, and activities. To be engaged in ministry is not the concern of a small group of religious specialists, but is the work of the entire body of believers.

This biblical vision contrasts with the predominant understanding of ministry in most contemporary churches. Even the terms "clergy" and "laity" represent a division of calling, qualification, and work. While laity may be involved in certain aspects, the primary responsibility for the ministry of the church rests with the professionally trained clergy – “the minister.” The problem here is not with those persons who are “clergy,” but with the fact that such a division overlooks the giftedness and essential ministry of the whole community. It stimulates passivity and dependence, and restricts the scope, power, and credibility of the church as a redemptive, missional community.

Where clergy are expected to fulfill the diverse tasks of ministry, they are assumed also to be extraordinarily (and unrealistically) gifted individuals. "They are to be natural leaders, skilled orators, capable administrators, compassionate counselors, wise decision makers, dispassionate conflict resolvers, and astute theologians."² The multiple gifts of the whole body have been centralized into one person – a super-Christian. It is no wonder that many clergy have become disillusioned and frustrated, experiencing stress and burnout.

Bonhoeffer offers a different vision of ministry, one that is congruent with the New Testament. It is not one in which more lay people are invited to be trained and incorporated into “professional” ministry. Rather, it is a vision that transforms the very understanding and practice of ministry. Bonhoeffer's discussion in this chapter is helpful in stimulating the church's communal imagination about what ministry means. Moving beyond clerical services and church programs, ministry is envisioned as redemptive relationships in community. Christians learn what it means to be the body of Christ in the world as they minister to and with one other.

² Christian Smith, *Going to the Root: Nine Proposals for Radical Church Renewal* (Herald Press, 1992), p. 38.

Christians need one another. God's Word – the good news of forgiveness, reconciliation, and new creation in Jesus Christ – does not spring naturally from the human heart or intellect. It can only be communicated through the witness in word and deed of faithful believers listening attentively to one another, actively helping one another, and bearing one another. Empowered by the Holy Spirit, through such practical yet essential ministry, Christians are able to become proclaimers of God's Word for and to one another. In a multiplicity of ways, the ministry or service Christians offer is that of “meeting one another as bringers of the message of salvation” (p.23).³

Main Ideas

- Seeking, claiming, and defending one's role and identity in a group over and against others sows seeds of discord in the Christian community.
- Not self-justification, domination or force, but justification by grace and therefore service should govern the Christian community. Each person's role and identity in the group ultimately serves the same overall goal: service.
- The discipline of the tongue – not saying all that occurs to you – is an essential ministry that members of the body must learn to offer each other.
- The differences that exist among people within the Christian community are not incentives for talking, judging, and condemning others, but rather causes for rejoicing in and serving one another.
- In Christian community, every individual is an indispensable link in a chain. As such, each has a task to do and all depend upon the ministry of others.
- The first service that one owes to others in the community of faith consists in patient, attentive listening to the other. This is the beginning of love in the community.

³ This introduction is adapted from an essay by Inagrace T. Dietterich in *The Center Letter* (Volume 28: Number 3; March 1998), “The Ministry of All Believers.”

- The second service that each is to perform for the other in Christian community is that of active helpfulness – even in the simplest and smallest ways.
- The third service consists of bearing others – not sidestepping the “burden” that others may impose upon us in the community of faith. It is in such bearing that the Christian community shares in the fellowship of Christ’s cross.
- These ministries are reciprocal. We are strengthened in offering ministry to others in the knowledge that it is being offered to us as well.
- The ministry of proclaiming is contingent on the others – listening, helping, and bearing. It involves the communication of the Word of God to and with each other. Sharing the Word with another person is more difficult than preaching from the pulpit.
- Authority in the Christian community is dependent upon humble service and is found only where the ministry of hearing, helping, bearing, and proclaiming is carried out. No other qualities are necessarily helpful. *Authority lies in the exercise of ministry, not in personal attributes.*

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. Why is it important that no member in the Christian community be “unemployed” in ministry as Bonhoeffer understands it?
2. How is justification by grace and the posture of service the key to all the ministries that are described in this Chapter?

It will be worth our time to look at each “ministry” in particular as described in this Chapter:

The Ministry of Holding One’s Tongue

1. Who has not been tempted to judge the other for their different-ness, rather than to rejoice in it?

Does the practice of “holding one’s tongue” actually change a person’s attitude and disposition toward another whom one might be inclined to judge? If so, how?

What makes this practical ministry essential for the community of believers?

The Ministry of Meekness

2. What does it mean to think of oneself no more highly than one ought to think? (Rom.12:3)

What is its importance for the life of the Christian community?
Why is it so hard?

The Ministry of Listening

3. What is the case that Bonhoeffer is making about the essential importance of listening attentively and patiently to one another?

A close connection is drawn between our capacity to listen to each other and our ability to listen to and hear God. What do you make of this? Is it true? If so, why?

The Ministry of Helpfulness

4. Where (if at all) does this statement hit home for you: “One who worries about the loss of time that petty, outward acts of helpfulness entail is usually taking the importance of their own career too solemnly”(p. 99).

5. Being able to be helpful to another may depend on one’s life intersecting regularly with another’s. The more our paths cross, the more we know what each is facing each day, bringing a greater possibility for being helpful.

How much do people’s lives intersect regularly in your congregation? How well do people know what is going on in each other’s lives?

The Ministry of Bearing

6. Perhaps this is the hardest ministry of all. “It is...the *freedom* of the other person... that is a burden to the Christian.” (p.101). Bonhoeffer associates this ministry alone with “bearing the cross.”

What does “bearing” involve?

Where does your congregation find it challenging to “bear” others within the community of faith? What in your life together helps you to bear each other?

Where does forgiveness come into this?

The Ministry of Proclaiming

7. What, according to Bonhoeffer, is involved in the ministry of “proclaiming the word”? How is it different than preaching from the pulpit?

Where do you see this ministry occurring in your congregation? What is challenging about “proclaiming the word” to and with one another?

What training and support is offered in your congregation for development in this ministry. What would it take to equip and support more intentionally the practice of this ministry in your congregation?

The Ministry of Authority

8. Today’s fascination with skilled “leadership,” may contrast sharply with the assertion: “The church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus and the brethren.” And “trust... is determined by the faithfulness with which a man (or woman) serves Jesus Christ, never by the extraordinary talents which he possesses” (p.109).

How does this assertion challenge or conform to the understanding and practice of authority in your congregation?

How does this vision of authority ring true within the context of a vision of the “ministry of all believers?”

SESSION 6:
CONFESSION AND COMMUNION

So in the Christian community when the call to brotherly confession and forgiveness goes forth it is a call to the great grace of God in the Church. (p.112)

Entering In

Bible Study: A radical togetherness

In Christ we are invited – even more, we are summoned and authorized – to move beyond the boundaries of our individual lives into the shared reality of Christian community. The community of faith to which the New Testament bears witness is characterized by the practice of a radical togetherness.⁴ This is seen most clearly in the New Testament in the frequent use of the reciprocal pronoun, “one another” (*allelon*). The list included here, far from exhaustive, offers a vision for the life of the community of faith. It is a community of persons who –

- “live in harmony with one another” (Rom.12:16)
- “welcome one another (Rom. 15:7)
- “are servants of one another” (Gal.5:13)
- “comfort one another” (I Thess. 5:11)
- “bear with one another lovingly (I Thess.5:11)
- “do good to one another” (I Thess. 5:15)
- “are subject to one another (Eph.5:21)
- “confess our sins to one another” (James 5:16)
- “forgive one another” (Cor.2:13)
- “love one another from the heart” (I Pet.1:22)
- “meet one another with humility” (I Pet.5:5)
- “pray for one another” (James 5:16)
- “have fellowship with one another” (I John 1:7)

Can you identify other “one another” texts?

1. What strikes you about this list?

⁴ Gerhard Lohfink, *Jesus and Community*, (Fortress Press/ Paulist Press, 1982) p.100-101.

2. Which of these have you experienced in your congregation? Which would you like to see more of?

3. Which are harder to practice than others? Which are easier?

4. What in your local congregation promotes and enables the practice of radical togetherness described in these passages? What blocks it?

Exploring Life Together

Confession and Communion (*Life Together*, pp. 110-122)

An editorial appeared in the Chicago Tribune a few years ago entitled, “Have We Lost the Language of Forgiveness?” The writer told a story of her visits to her grandmother’s church – a Finnish Lutheran Church – in Pennsylvania on “communion Sundays,” an event that happened infrequently, as it was the congregation’s habit to celebrate Communion only four times a year. But on communion Sundays, there was another practice, equally infrequent, but nonetheless significant. It was the confession and forgiveness of sins.

The worship service began as a Lutheran liturgy typically begins, with general confession. But then it all changed. The pastor stepped down out of the chancel. There was silence throughout the cavernous sanctuary. Then a quiet shuffling of feet could be heard. The creaking of pews added to the muted sound. Movement began as people quietly got up out of their seats and began to move around the sanctuary to meet with others. A few whispers grew into a quiet hum of muffled voices. One person would stop and bend over to speak quietly to another still sitting. Another met a fellow member in the aisle, standing, face to face. Scattered around the sanctuary, in pews and standing, one even kneeling before a friend, multiple conversations were going on, quietly. “I was wrong to...” “I hurt your feelings when I... and I am sorry.” “I mis-spoke when I... will you forgive me?” “Do you remember when...?” “Can we start over again?” And words like “I am sorry too, will you forgive me?” “Let’s forget about it, OK.” “I forgive you.” This went on for several minutes.

As quietly and softly as it had started, the whispers and shuffling feet and creaking pews quieted again as everyone returned to their seat. Just as quiet as before, but you could feel the difference those few moments made in peoples' lives, and in the life of the congregation. The pastor walked back up the steps into the chancel and spoke the general words of forgiveness, "As a called and ordained minister of the church of Jesus Christ I now announce to you the forgiveness of all of your sins." It was a powerful word. But they had already heard it. They already knew. They were forgiven.

Today's politicized climate allows no one to confess wrongdoing or fault for fear of being utterly demolished before others. This is as true in some congregational and denominational meetings today as in the secular realm. Consumers are schooled in accepting "no fault" and in going for all they can get. To address low self-esteem, psychologists suggest that we not admit wrong or back down but instead stand up for ourselves. In a litigious environment we dare not ever admit fault. As a society we no longer have access to the language of confession and forgiveness.

Yet the language of confession and forgiveness is the church's language. We don't expect everyone to know or practice it in the wider society. But we – the church – don't have an option. It is our language. "If you forgive the sins of any they are forgiven. If you retain the sins of any, they are retained." (Jn.20:23). In other words, if we Christians won't forgive, forgiveness won't happen in our world! And the vicious cycle of revenge and retribution will live on.

Perhaps no other *allelon* passage above is more challenging – and more needed – than this: "Confess your sins to one another... that you may be healed" (James 5:16). None points better to the radical nature and need of Christian community in our time.

Main Ideas

- Faithful community is lacking when congregations have fellowship as "devout" people but not as the "undevout," as sinners. Only when we are sinners can we be changed by the forgiveness that God offers in Jesus Christ.
- Jesus' commission to offer forgiveness of sins is given to the whole congregation. When an individual exercises it, it is exercised on behalf of the whole.

- Where confession and forgiveness take place there is a breakthrough from isolation to community.
- Confession of sin challenges all self-justification, and is therefore a dying with Christ on the cross. This humiliation and death is the path of breakthrough to new life.
- We have certainty of our sins being forgiven when God's word of forgiveness is heard on the lips of a fellow Christian in response to my confession. No kind of self-talk can compare to the real human words of forgiveness that come from another person's lips.
- Anyone who knows her/himself to be a sinner and in need of God's grace, and practices confession, can hear the confession of another in the congregation. It is not a good thing for one person in the congregation to be the confessor for all the others.
- Confession should not be a pious, routine activity, but one through which a Christian seeks only God's promise of forgiveness and life.
- To go to the Lord's Supper rightly prepared is first to go settle our wrongs committed against one another.
- The fellowship of the Lord's Supper is the unmatched fulfillment of Christian community. Here the community has reached its goal – joyfully united in body and blood at the table of the Lord now and for all eternity.

Questions for Discussion and Reflection

1. What is the practice of confession and forgiveness like in the life of your congregation? Where and when does it occur? Who is involved?

Compare the practice of confessing sin or fault with another individual person to (a) confessing to God in the silence of your private prayer, and (b) taking part in a general confession of sins in a worship service. What difference does it make to confess and receive forgiveness from another?

2. There is evidence that at the seminary at Finkenwalde many members of the community initially felt very uncomfortable with the introduction of person-to-person confession and forgiveness.

How comfortable is your congregation with the notion of confessing personal sin or fault to a fellow member?

Can you share an example when this happened in your church?
What difference did it make?

3. Later, members of the Finkenwalde community discovered that their celebration of the Lord's supper was both more powerful and more joyful as a result of recovering the link between confession and communion.

How, in practice, does your congregation link confession and communion?

How might confession and communion become more closely linked?

3. Confessing sin to another seems to assume a closeness – folks would know enough about each other to be able to welcome, to understand the personal nature of what the other is confessing, and to forgive in Christ's name.

Where and in what contexts do such relationships exist in your congregation? What would need to change for this practice to grow?

What difference do you see it making in your congregation when people come together to worship and celebrate communion?

SESSION 7:
PULLING IT ALL TOGETHER

When God was merciful, when He revealed Jesus Christ to us as our Brother, when He won our hearts by His love, this was the beginning of our instruction in divine love. When God was merciful to us, we learned to be merciful with our brethren. When we received forgiveness instead of judgment, we, too, were made ready to forgive our brethren. What God did to us, we then owed to others. (pp.24-25)

Entering In

Bible Study: Gratitude and thanksgiving

Listen as **Philippians 4:4-7** is read aloud.

1. What do you think it means to “rejoice in the Lord”?
2. What enables God’s people to rejoice?
3. Where do you experience “rejoicing” in your congregation?
4. In what ways can a disposition of gratitude change the way we perceive, think, and live?

Listen as **Philippians 4:8-9** is read aloud.

5. Shaped by gratitude and thanksgiving, what will the church think and talk about?
6. What have you experienced in your congregation that is “worthy of praise”?

7. In what ways could our congregation more fully embody an approach or posture of habitual gratitude and thanksgiving?

Exploring Life Together

Use this Session for walking back through your notes and learnings over these weeks of study together.

1. As you review, jot down your key ideas or insights in the space provided below:

COMMUNITY:

THE DAY WITH OTHERS:

THE DAY ALONE:

MINISTRY:

Appendix: A Guide for Group Facilitators

The Role of the Facilitator

The role of a facilitator differs from that of an instructor. While there is important content to be covered during the study of *Life Together*, the cultivation of a learning community is even more important. Thus the role of a facilitator is less to impart particular subject matter, and more to invite participants into a mutually enriching conversation.

Your primary role is to help the group to grow in its understanding and experience of Christian community. You can do this by focusing upon four areas:

1. **Creating a comfortable and friendly climate.** Choose a room that is neither cramped nor cavernous, with enough space to allow for a circle of comfortable chairs (may be placed around a table). Seat participants so they can easily see and interact with one another. If the group is large, there should be enough room that chairs can easily be moved and gathered into smaller groupings. Have room enough for them to use their Bible, *Life Together*, and the Study Guide. Provide coffee and/or other refreshments. Consider making a newsprint stand, markers, reference books, and other supportive materials and equipment available.
2. **Being a guide for the group in its learning journey.** Many adults have not had positive experiences with Bible study. Model and enable the group to be accepting and supportive of one another. Model and encourage group members to take risks by sharing where they feel uncomfortable. Remind the group that not everyone will be “good” at the same things; this is why we need each other. Confusion about what the text of *Life Together* or Scripture says and means is OK; it can lead to new insights. Encourage people to share, but also to listen. Working in sub-groups (of 2 or 3) allows more “air-time” for participants. Rather than taking a “position” on a particular text, invite dialogue to explore how we are helped to see God’s vision for the church. Start and end the sessions on time.
3. **Helping the group clarify the shape or design of its journey.** Most groups will need 1 ½ to 2 hours for each session. Plan to meet seven times in all. Covenant as a group to read each chapter of *Life Together* between sessions. Use the Study Guide as the guide for each Session, moving through each section of the Study Guide as a group. It will be helpful to read out

loud, taking turns. Group size of 7-8 is suggested (the size of a group that could comfortably sit around your living room and have engaging conversation together). If the group is larger (more than 8 or 10) the group may divide into groups of 2s or 3s to read and respond to questions together. These sub-groups then come together to share their insights with the total group.

If the group is up to 15 or more, consider forming two or more groups. This will provide greater opportunity for formation – engagement with the texts and with one another, making connections, building relationships, and stimulating discoveries. The sessions do not need an expert in the group to lead them (i.e. pastor or scholar), though, regardless of size, the group and facilitator need to be in alignment with each other about the goals and norms of the group sessions.

Multiple groups may still meet at the same time in the same room. While each group forms and functions as a group, they are all brought together by a facilitator at some points in each session to share their learnings.

For example:

- Facilitator draws attention to the start of the Session for all groups in the room.
- Groups do their checking in (15 minutes), and this may take place in still smaller groups of 2-3.
- Prayer in groups.
- Move into Bible study as a whole group, reading the introduction and text aloud.
- Bible study questions are explored in groups (15 minutes).
- The chapter is discussed in groups (50 minutes).
- Facilitator calls groups back, inviting insights, questions, learnings from across the groups (10 minutes).
- Closing prayer and sending.

4. Stimulate Creativity. The goal of this study process is not simply to encourage individual learning, but to provide an opportunity for members of the study group to share, test, and learn from one another. Thus it is important to be as creative as possible in discovering ways to explore and share learnings. You might have participants draw their insights and learnings. Have people create or share symbols to stimulate their imagination. Encourage members to keep their eyes open during the week (television, newspapers, magazines) for resources to contribute to the discussion. As the study moves along, people may come across a particular hymn or prayer to share with the group that expresses the theme of the study. Remember, the intent is not to master

Bonhoeffer's theology and thinking, but to contribute to a deeper understanding and practice of Christian community.

Before the First Session of the Study Group

1. Read through Bonhoeffer's *Life Together* and this Study Guide. Look up the biblical passages.
2. Clarify the overall goals of the study (see Goals of this Study Process, p. 2). As the study begins and periodically during the study, make sure participants are clear about these overall goals.
3. Notice how *Life Together* and this Study Guide are organized. As you prepare for each session, see how the particular session is related to the whole, what came before, and what comes after. Prepare accordingly.
4. Begin each unit with a time of "Entering In." This includes "checking in" with one another's lives, and praying. You may also include a hymn or song. Then, engage in the brief Bible study conversation and reflection. Sessions may be closed with prayer that grows from the discussion. Ask, "how does our study and conversation cause us to pray today?"
5. The questions in this Study Guide are not intended to be profound or complex, but to enable the group to interact with the Bonhoeffer text, reflect upon their insights, and share with other members of the group. Use the questions provided as a resource. Do not let the group get derailed by arguing with the question or seeking the "right" answer. If a specific question is not helpful, move on to the next. If different questions suggested by you or other group members will facilitate the process, use them.
6. Decide upon the resources needed to facilitate the group's study. A newsprint stand, markers, tape may be desirable.
7. Make sure that a copy of *Life Together* (translated and with an Introduction by John W. Doberstein), Bible, and Study Guide are available to each participant. These will be needed for everyone to participate fully. Suggested additional resources: notebooks, pens.
8. Identify the room for the study process. Do whatever you can to make it comfortable and inviting.

Suggestions for the First Session

First Hour

1. Begin with worship/prayer.
2. Spend some time getting acquainted. In order to break the ice, participants might be asked to share one hope they have for this study process. Make sure everyone knows one another's name.

3. If they have not already been given out, distribute the book *Life Together* and the Study Guide. Explain how the book is organized. Introduce the purpose and goals of the study (Study Guide p.1, 2).
4. Have the group take the time to discuss “Group Norms” (Study Guide p. 3) for your time together in study and conversation. Ask the group to add additional norms by completing this sentence: A great study process would be one where...” The study process is not intended simply to be informational, but to contribute to the cultivation of Christian community in your group. Do not skip over this time of forming group norms. It is an important element of the process of both understanding and experiencing Christian community.
5. Draw the group's attention to the format of each session (Study Guide p.4) and how you propose to approach the sessions. Remind participants to use the questions, but not to let the questions block their reflection and participation. You will be able to adapt the format of your sessions as you go along if necessary.
6. Encourage group members to have a notebook to write down personal observations and responses to the study questions, and to keep notes on the group's discussion. If there is interest in your church to learn from the insights of several study groups, it will be helpful for participants to be able to refer to these notes as they contribute to integrating their shared learnings at the end of the study.
7. Read the Questions for Reflection and Discussion on p.4 of the Study Guide. Invite participants to respond to the questions.

Second Hour

1. Read Doberstein's introduction together (*Life Together* p. 7-13). This is a very brief biography of Dietrich Bonhoeffer. Read it aloud, each taking a turn. Reading aloud allows for the group to stop and react together as they read.
2. Answer the questions on p.5 of the Study Guide.
3. Make the assignment of reading Chapter 1 of *Life Together* before the next session.

Suggestions for all Sessions

Entering In

Take a few moments at the start of each session to “check in” with each other. This may involve simply going around the group, sharing briefly what made you happy or concerned over the time since the group last met. A question like this may invite participants to share at first: “Since our last gathering, what has happened in your life that you would like others to know about?” Everyone is invited to share, but no one is coerced to do so. This is not a “share or die” group!

Follow “checking in” with a brief time of prayer. This may involve options such as –

- the facilitator offering prayer as best she/he can on behalf of the whole study group.
- the facilitator inviting a member of the group to offer prayer as best she/he can on behalf of the group, thus practicing Bonhoeffer's instruction on saying our prayers together in Chapter 2 "The Day with Others".
- Praying in "popcorn" fashion, offering prayers spontaneously as the Spirit leads each to pray (or not) aloud. No one is coerced into praying, but all are invited. Brief silences are OK to allow anyone who wants to offer prayer to do so.

The time of Entering In and Bible Study may be engaged in smaller groupings of 3, especially if the group is over 8 people. This provides opportunity for everyone at the start of each session to engage personally with others and listen attentively. It also provides each with more air time without feeling like you are using up too much session time.

The biblical texts in this study provide scriptural anchoring for the study of Christian community. Make it a group practice to read the brief introduction, the biblical text and questions aloud. If you remain in the large group for checking in, the group may divide into smaller groupings after the text is read. Smaller groups read the text again and discuss it using the questions as a guide.

Exploring Life Together

There are three parts of this section:

- An introduction. This provides a point of entry into discussion of the chapter. It seeks to make connections to the context – Bonhoeffer's and/or the church's context today.
- Main Ideas. These provide a summary of key points made in the text of *Life Together*.
- Questions for Reflection and Discussion.

It will aid participants to read both the introduction and main ideas in this Study Guide along with the chapter in *Life Together* before each session.

Begin the discussion of the chapter in *Life Together* by inviting the group to share what caught their attention when they read the chapter (What struck you? Where did your mind stop to ponder?) Invite people to share briefly, giving everyone a chance to share once. Use this not so much as a time to discuss as a time to get on the table the range of reactions – questions, insights, learnings – within the group to the chapter. As the group listens to each other's initial reactions to the reading, the group may discover clues to what is important to discuss as a group.

The Questions for Reflection and Discussion lead you into substantive reflection on the chapter. Use these, but do not feel that you must be bound to them to the exclusion of the group's own questions. And do not feel bound to use all of them. They are meant to help the group make connections with the text and with current and hoped-for practices of discipleship in your congregation. The facilitator may wish to prioritize the questions ahead of the session, ready to skip some if time gets short. (Most all who read *Life Together* discover it is rich and comprehensive. The number of questions in this study guide attempt to claim and engage its substantive nature. There may be a case for expanding your study time and having 12 sessions instead of seven).

Conclude the session by claiming a few minutes before ending to summarize the group session. This involves summarizing the content of learnings, key questions, and insights. It also involves naming the experience of the group in terms of level of energy, engagement, interaction. The facilitator can make these summary observations as he/she is able, but may also invite the group to name and claim these for itself. The facilitator will be sure to share back the summary at the start of the next session to build continuity from session to session.