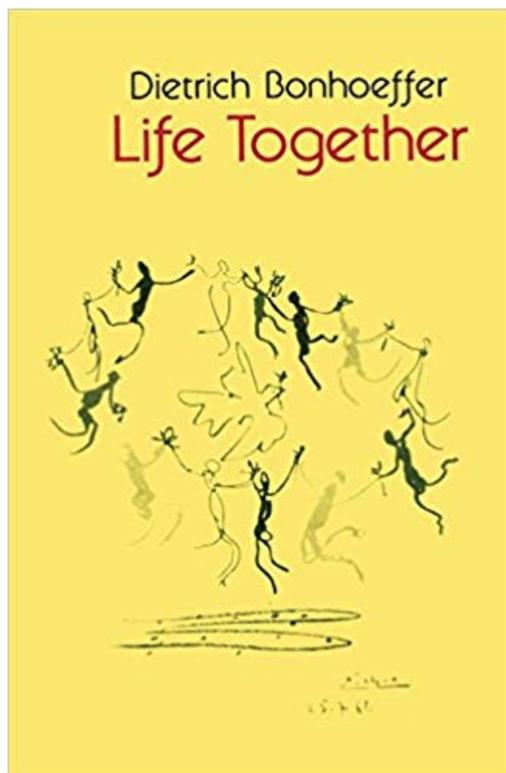


Life Together *by* Dietrich Bonhoeffer



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Reviews of the *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Dishadel

Life Together is a simple-to-digest guide to what Godly fellowship was intended to be, but which seems to have been lost over the ages. One can roughly divide the book into two conceptual halves - Individual fellowship with God and corporate fellowship with the Body of Christ.

In the most basic of language, free from extremely technical theology, Bonhoeffer calls the believer back to a humility which Jesus modeled and proclaimed but which has, sadly, been lost in our Greek-based culture of self-actualization. Indeed, taking Bonhoeffer to heart can prove to be a formidable challenge to the believer who desires to truly take this book to heart, as it runs counter to the pervasive message of self-love and self-glorification.

I would recommend this book to any believer who desires to know God, but who has experienced difficulty in coming into His presence, whether alone or in the presence of other believers.

just one girl

I've read theological treatments by this 20th century theologian which were considerably more in-depth. *Life Together* is essentially an orientation manual for new believers or a quick survey of practical spiritual dynamics in a New Testament church. Each chapter could read as though it was a devotional presented at a Christian retreat or a sermon delivered by a particularly practical pastor. There aren't any particular surprises in *Life Together* (except for a relatively strange observation on congregational singing in worship), but there are challenges for those who are open to growing spiritually from wherever they are and there are simply some very well-written expressions of basic spiritual positions.

Bonhoeffer's perspective begins with the idea that not only are humans helpless and hopeless without the love of Christ, but humans really have nothing (or at least, little) to offer each other without Christ as Mediator (Location 123—all references to my Kindle Edition of the book). "The more we received, the more we were able to give; and the more meagre our brotherly love, the less were we living by God's mercy and love. Thus God himself taught us to meet one another as God has met us in Christ." (Loc 139) "The more genuine and deeper our community becomes, the more will everything else between us recede, the more clearly and purely will Jesus Christ and his work become the one and only thing that is vital between us." (Loc 151)

I particularly resonated with Bonhoeffer's assertion, "God is not a God of the emotions but the God of truth. Only that fellowship which faces such disillusionment, with all its unhappy and ugly aspects, begins to be what it should be in God's sight, begins to grasp in faith the promise that is given to it." (Loc 167) Further, in seeking that truth, Bonhoeffer urges believers not to neglect the scripture. "The Scripture is a whole and every word, every sentence, possesses such multiple relationships with the whole that it is impossible always to keep the whole in view when listening to details. It becomes apparent, therefore, that the whole of the Scripture and hence every passage in it as well far surpasses our understanding. It is good for us to be daily reminded of this fact, which again points to Jesus Christ himself, 'in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge' (Col. 2.3). (Loc 528) He goes on to ask, "How, for example, shall we ever attain certainty and confidence in our personal and church activity if we do not stand on solid biblical ground? It is not our heart that determines our course, but God's Word." (Loc 559). He goes on, "How often we hear innumerable arguments 'from life' and 'from experience' put forward as the basis for most crucial decisions, but the argument of Scripture is missing." (Loc 561)

Of course, I wasn't too wild about his non-musical assumptions with regard to singing. He seems to suggest that harmonization and improvisation in congregational singing is a matter of vanity and insincerity. Even though I disagree with this, check out his discussion: "There is no place in the service of worship where vanity and bad taste can so intrude as in the singing. There is, first, the improvised second part which one hears almost everywhere. It attempts to give the necessary background, the missing fullness to the soaring unison tone, and thus kills both the words and the tone." (Loc 633)

The description of table fellowship was interesting, however. "The table fellowship of Christians implies obligation. It is our daily bread that we eat, not my own. We share our bread. Thus we are firmly bound to one another not only in the Spirit but in our whole physical being. The one bread that is given to our fellowship links us together in a firm covenant." (Loc 746) I really believe this would bring many believers closer together if they understood it appropriately.

Perhaps, the most valuable part of the book was Bonhoeffer's summary of ministry. He calls for the ministries of: holding one's tongue, meekness (as opposed to ambition), listening (actively, not passively), helpfulness, bearing (as in being both forbearing and supportive), proclaiming, and authority. This is different than most lists, but quite needed in churches during and since Bonhoeffer's time. One thought seems expressly valuable: "The Church does not need brilliant personalities but faithful servants of Jesus Christ and the brethren." (Loc 1297)

Taulkree

An incredibly well written (and I assume well translated) explanation of our (followers of Christ) need of other believers for life to function the way it was designed. Bonhoeffer's insight into what makes the church important to our day to day walk with God, is what makes this book stand out among in spite of the waves of church bettering books that have over-saturated the market in the last few decades. Before anyone reads a book on how to make their church more effective, they ought to read this. In my opinion, it is a quintessential read for anyone aspiring the position of elder or deacon in the church, and maybe just about everybody else who considers themselves a believer in Jesus Christ.

SING

Potentially one of the most important books of modern Christian thought, and this is one of the few books that endeavors to invite Christians into a contemplative life of meditation, work, and love. This is given that many churches find themselves generating artificial, Americanized communities that stand in sharp contrast to the community Christ sought while on earth. An irony is that, rather than point a person away from church and sinners, Bonhoeffer encourages us toward church and sinners. We may not even have the chance to love until we have lived in community, sinned against a brother/sister, and have been forgiven. One is given an opportunity to read what Christianity would be "in context" for Christianity cannot be separated from community and common suffering. This book is for people that want to try living in community in a way that asks more of us all, and for those who also interested in ordering their lives with meditation, scripture, and sharing a common life.

Darkraven

This book is one I've been meaning to read for years. It has been quoted and referenced in so many other books, sermons, and articles on Christian community. It's densely packed with tons of sweet truths to suck on for hours like a good cough drop. I can definitely understand why it has been so loved, but it just didn't quite live up to all the hype. My expectations were obviously too high. The book is just too short and brief to be a definitive book on Christian fellowship. However, it would be hard to imagine not including these principles and truths when discussing life together in Christ. I liked it a lot and will use this book to train up people in our church because it is short and sweet.

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