



# Sinners & Saints

## DISCIPLESHIP PROGRAM

Taken from pages 17-19 of *Life Together* by Dietrich Bonhoeffer

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 evildoers 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 a cloistered life but in the thick of foes. There is his commission, his work. "The Kingdom is to be in the midst of your enemies. And he who will not suffer this does not want to be of the Kingdom of Christ; he wants to be among friends, to sit among roses and lilies, not with the bad people but the devout people. O you blasphemers and betrayers of Christ! If Christ had done what you are doing who would ever have been spared?" (Martin Luther).

In this introductory paragraph, Bonhoeffer desperately wants you, the reader, to know that life in community is something valued by God. Jesus lived in community and when he was on the cross he was without his community, "he was utterly alone." Not alone in the sense that no one was around him, but alone in the sense that every around him were enemies. It is this reality of Jesus life that Bonhoeffer tells us that we belong in the midst of our enemies (the world) but strengthened by a community around us.

What do you think Martin Luther is saying in this quote?

Post about it in the discord server. You can find access to the discord server in the email you received after signing up.



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"I will sow them among the people: and they shall remember me in far countries" (Zech.10:9). According to God's will Christendom is a scattered people, scattered like seed "into all the kingdoms of the earth" (Deut. 28:15). That is its curse and its promise. God's people must dwell in far countries among the unbelievers, but it will be the seed of the Kingdom of God in all the world.

"I will ...gather them; for I have redeemed them: ... and they shall return" (Zech.10:8, 9). When will that happen? It has happened in Jesus Christ, who died "that he should gather together in one the children of God that were scattered abroad" (John 11:52), and it will finally occur visibly at the end of time when the angels of God "shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matt.24:31). Until then, God's people remain scattered, held together solely in Jesus Christ, having become one in the fact that, dispersed among unbelievers, they remember Him in the far countries.

Bonhoeffer tells us that through Scripture it is clear that God has a plan to scatter his people across the earth. How is this a curse and a promise?

To continue this theme of scattering, Bonhoeffer here tells us where we can find our unity, in Christ. It is because of Jesus Christ that we a community around us because Jesus' death on the cross adopts us into God's family. We are "held together in Jesus Christ."



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So between the death of Christ and the Last Day it is only by a gracious anticipation of the last things that Christians are privileged to live in visible fellowship with other Christians. It is by the grace of God that a congregation is permitted to gather visibly in this world 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. They know that visible fellowship is a blessing. They remember, as the Psalmist did, how they went "with the multitude . . . to the house of God, with the voice of joy and praise, with a multitude that kept holyday" (Ps. 42:4). But they remain alone in far countries, a scattered seed according to God's will. Yet what is denied them as an actual experience they seize upon more fervently in faith. Thus the exiled disciple of the Lord, John the Apocalyptist, celebrates in the loneliness of Patmos the heavenly worship with his congregations "in the Spirit on the Lord's day" (Rev. 1: 10).

We are reminded that living among other Christians is a privilege. Not all Christians get this opportunity. We ought to cherish this privilege and take full advantage of it!

What does Bonhoeffer mean by "Yet what is denied them as an actual experience they seize upon more fervently in faith."



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He sees the seven candlesticks, his congregations, the seven stars, the angels of the congregations, and in the midst and above it all the Son of Man, Jesus Christ, in all the splendor of the resurrection. He strengthens and fortifies him by His Word. This is the heavenly fellowship, shared by the exile on the day of his Lord's resurrection.

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer. Longingly, the imprisoned apostle Paul calls his "dearly beloved son in the faith," Timothy, to come to him in prison in the last days of his life; he would see him again and have him near. Paul has not forgotten the tears Timothy shed when last they parted (II Tim. 1:4). Remembering the congregation in Thessalonica, Paul prays "night and day . . . exceedingly that we might see your face" (I Thess. 3: 10) . The aged John knows that his joy will not be full until he can come to his own people and speak face to face instead of writing with ink (2 John 12).

This is a vision from Revelation. Bonhoeffer uses this to illustrate to the reader that Christ strengthens us by his Word.

We are to be encouraged by one another. Being together as Christians is one of the great joys of this life and ought to be cherished.