

MORNINGS WITH  
**BONHOEFFER**

100 REFLECTIONS ON THE CHRISTIAN LIFE

DONALD K. MCKIM

Abingdon Press / *Nashville*

MORNINGS WITH BONHOEFFER  
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MANUFACTURED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

*For Stephen R. Haynes  
Bonhoeffer scholar, dedicated disciple, esteemed friend  
With gratitude*



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# Preface

Through the years, I've had a passion to communicate theological insights to others, especially in the context of the church's life. One way I have tried to do this is through devotional books to introduce and interpret theologians by providing short, devotional reflections on a quotation from their writings. Thus *Coffee with Calvin: Daily Devotions* and *Moments with Martin Luther: 95 Daily Devotions* emerged.

Now it is Dietrich Bonhoeffer's turn. Bonhoeffer's language may be more directly understandable than Luther's and Calvin's since he is closer to us historically. But his thoughts are profound for Christian theology and for Christian living. My hope here is to interpret Bonhoeffer and reflect on the meaning and significance of his thoughts for our lives today in the church and as Christian disciples.

I first encountered a Dietrich Bonhoeffer book when I was a sophomore at Westminster College in Pennsylvania in 1968. On Sunday evenings, our Christian study group read and discussed Bonhoeffer's *The Cost of Discipleship*. I'd known about Bonhoeffer's life, but his classic book put forth the demand of Jesus to "Follow me" in direct and compelling ways. Bonhoeffer's book helped orient me to a life of discipleship and the meaning of the "costly grace" that obedience to Jesus Christ brings.

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A few years later, I took a course on Bonhoeffer at Pittsburgh Theological Seminary with Dr. Arthur C. Cochrane, an expert on Bonhoeffer as he was on Karl Barth. This course introduced me to a range of Bonhoeffer's writings and the power of Bonhoeffer's theological witness in the midst of the evils being perpetrated by the Nazi regime in Germany.

When I taught theology in seminary, I always had students read Bonhoeffer's *Christ the Center* in courses on Christology. This pressed the question of how we understand Jesus Christ theologically, as the church has wrestled with this question through the centuries. But Bonhoeffer also asks the timeless question, "Who is Jesus Christ for us today?" This gives importance and immediacy to understanding Christ as a present reality who engages the world and each of us.

Bonhoeffer's thoughts are interconnected. Each theme in Bonhoeffer is related to other themes. This book of reflections does not try to present Bonhoeffer's theology as a coherent whole or to go into theological depth about the quotations presented for each reflection. Instead, the short reflections seek to present basic understandings and open visions for interpreting what Bonhoeffer's thoughts can mean for our Christian faith.

The reflections are divided into two main parts: "Believing as a Christian" and "Living as a Christian." Several themes make up each part. These are fluid categories, and there is no attempt to be thoroughly systematic in presenting the reflections in a specific order. The book can be used on a daily basis and read straight through, or it can be read at

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“random”—any time and in any order. Some suggestions about using the book follow here. The theological hope is that the Holy Spirit will be actively engaged in the reading and reflection on each piece—whenever and wherever!

I would like to thank folks at Abingdon Press, who have been collegially helpful with this project. Mary Catherine Dean, associate publisher and editor-in-chief, has been most gracious and supportive. Dawn L. Woods enthusiastically and encouragingly helped through the publication approval process, for which I am most appreciative. Susan Salley has been kind and efficient through the publication process. Thanks also to Christina Boys for sharing her excellent editorial skills and to Susan Cornell for her fine help as well. Brenda Smotherman has valuably worked on publicity and marketing.

As always, my work could not be done without the love of my family. My wonderful wife, LindaJo, is my loving partner in all things, bringing gladness and delight to our life together. Our son Stephen and his wife, Caroline, with Maddie, Annie, and Jack, bless our lives in incomparable ways; as do our son Karl and his wife, Lauren. For the deep goodness of family love, we rejoice.

Special thanks go to the interlibrary loan department of the Germantown Public Library. These neighbors have been unfailingly competent and friendly in securing interlibrary loan materials.

My thanks extend to all who have labored long to provide Bonhoeffer resources, especially those involved in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works in English project. Thanks to those who

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have written extensively on Bonhoeffer, especially on the works in the “Selected Resources for Further Reflection” section.

When I was an editor for Westminster John Knox Press, it was a joy to invite my friends Stephen R. Haynes and Lori Brandt Hale, two superb Bonhoeffer scholars, to write *Bonhoeffer for Armchair Theologians* with illustrations by Ron Hill. This, I believe, is the best short introduction to Bonhoeffer’s life and thought available.

This book is dedicated to my friend, Steve Haynes. Steve is the Albert Bruce Curry Professor of Religious Studies at Rhodes College in Memphis and has been a firm friend for a long time. Though he describes himself as “more of a Bonhoeffer devotee than a Bonhoeffer scholar,” he certainly is a Bonhoeffer scholar and has made a number of important contributions to Bonhoeffer scholarship. Steve is a deeply committed Presbyterian Church (USA) minister, a fine teacher with a pastor’s heart, and a wonderful person who embodies Bonhoeffer’s words: “Discipleship is joy.” I am most grateful for our friendship.

My hope is this book will introduce readers to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. For those who already know him and his writing, I trust new insights on Bonhoeffer and from Bonhoeffer will be yours through these reflections.

Donald K. McKim  
Germantown, Tennessee  
February 1, 2018

# Using This Book

This is a book of reflections on Christian faith based on quotations from Dietrich Bonhoeffer. The reflections are meant to explain Bonhoeffer's thoughts and open considerations on the meanings of Bonhoeffer's words for the church and for Christian life today. The quotations in each devotion are drawn from the volumes in the Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works from Fortress Press with volume and page number at the end of each quotation. A list of volumes used can be found in the "Selected Resources" section at the back of the book.

My article looking into Bonhoeffer's life and the events that shaped his thoughts can be found at [www.abingdonpress.com/MorningswithBonhoeffer](http://www.abingdonpress.com/MorningswithBonhoeffer).

This book can be used for group devotions in various gatherings, or it can be used for personal devotion and reflection.

**Read.** A Scripture passage or verse is found at the top of each page. The Scripture can be meditated upon before the reflection is read. These thoughts can be kept in mind as the reflection is read.

Since the writing for each reflection is compact, each sentence has meaning and can be a source for contemplation. Reading each sentence can be deliberate, and one can pause after each sentence to think about it.

**Meditate.** After the reflection is read, one can ask:

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- What has Bonhoeffer said here?
- What do Bonhoeffer's thoughts mean for the life of the church?
- What do Bonhoeffer's thoughts mean for my life?
- What changes of attitude or actions are Bonhoeffer's words calling me (or us) toward?
- What are practical ways Bonhoeffer's thoughts can be put into practice in the church community? In my own life?

**Pray.** Incorporate what has emerged in your reading and meditation into a prayer. Pray for God's Holy Spirit to take this experience and lead into what God would have you be and do.

**Act.** Put into practice what the reflection points toward by acting in ways that reorient your present directions in life or that open new directions for service and action.



The title of each reflection can serve as a key phrase to bring important dimensions of the reflections to mind. You can review the contents and summarize what each reflection has meant to you, perhaps in the space at the end of each one.

If you keep a journal, a summary of the reflection/experience and what it means to you can be recorded. These summaries can be reviewed at various times in the future.

You can also consult works in the "Selected Resources for Further Reflection" section to pursue further readings by and about Bonhoeffer.

## Part 1

# Believing as a Christian



# Christian Beliefs



1

## Scripture Is God's Own Word

*What is Holy Scripture?* It is God's own word, in which, through the prophets and the apostles, he proclaims to me and to the church-community that Jesus Christ is God's Son and my sav[ior]. (14:785)



For Dietrich Bonhoeffer, as for all Protestants, Holy Scripture is the Word of God. The biblical canon—the books of the Old and New Testaments—is God's revelation. In Scripture, God communicates God's own self to us humans. Without the Scriptures, we would have no way of knowing God. We cannot peel back the clouds and look upon God in heaven! If we are to know who God is, it is God who has to "make the first move." God must reveal who God is if we are ever to come to a knowledge of God.

We believe God has spoken in the Scriptures. The Bible is "God's own word," says Bonhoeffer, given to us "through the prophets and the apostles." The biblical Scriptures are given through human beings who witness to what God has said and done.

The Bible is given to the "church-community," as Bonhoeffer said, and "to me." It proclaims a message: "that

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Jesus Christ is God’s Son and my savior.” This is the purpose of the Bible. Scripture points us to what God has done in sending Jesus Christ, God’s eternal Son. Jesus died on the cross so our sin against God can be forgiven. Jesus is our savior. When we believe in Jesus Christ we have “eternal life” (John 3:16).

Scripture gives “good news”—a word from God proclaiming God’s love for us and the way of salvation, how we can live as God’s people and be in a relationship of trust and love with God. We read God’s Word, hear the Scriptures proclaimed, and live in faith as God’s people.

2

## The Mirror of the Creator

Humankind is here the final work of God's self-glorification. The world is created for God, for God's honor alone, and humankind is the most precious receptacle, the very mirror of the Creator. It is totally for the sake of God's glory and honor as Creator that everything comes to pass. (3:72)



**G**enesis 1 tells us of God creating the heavens and the earth. God is the sovereign creator of all things.

The climax and completion of creation is the creation of humankind. God's good work of creation is expressed most clearly when God created humans in the divine image: "So God created humankind in his image" (Genesis 1:26).

Bonhoeffer commented on humankind in his theological work, *Creation and Fall*. He wrote, "Humankind is here the final work of God's self-glorification. The world is created for God, for God's honor alone, and humankind is the most precious receptacle, the very mirror of the Creator. It is totally for the sake of God's glory and honor as Creator that everything comes to pass."

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God's creation brings honor and glory to the creator. God's honor permeates the universe and is displayed on earth. The "most precious" place where God's glory is received is in humans. Human beings are "the very mirror of the Creator." We "reflect" God as a mirror since we are created in the "image" of God. When people see us, they should be reminded of God—not by how we look but by who we are and what we do. We live for God's glory! Are we a "mirror" of our Creator to others?

God creates and then sustains and guides the creation so it is "for the sake of God's glory and honor" that all things happen. Let us rejoice and reflect our good Creator!

3

## No Longer Loving the Other

This [the fall] means the human being no longer regards the other person with love. Instead one person sees the other in terms of their being over against each other; each sees the other as divided from himself or herself. (3:122)



There is a sad situation in human life. We see it every time we read the daily news. The bad news is the human condition—who humans are and what they do.

Bonhoeffer wrote a powerful book, *Creation and Fall*, in which he interpreted the early chapters of Genesis, which tell not only of God’s creation of humanity but also what humans did—which has affected human nature ever since.

God created humans to live in God’s image, to live in freedom and obedience to their Creator. But the stories in Genesis 3 describe what theologians such as Bonhoeffer call “the fall” of humanity. Instead of obeying God, humans rebel against God. They want to be “like God” (Genesis 3:5). Instead of putting God, from whom humans draw life, at the center of life, humans turn in upon themselves (an image Luther often used) and put themselves at the center of their

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existence. Humans have fallen away from God, seeking to become their own creator.

The result is the relationship of trust and obedience between God and humans is lost. By being divided from the creator, humans also become divided against themselves. As Bonhoeffer writes, “This [the fall] means the human being no longer regards the other person with love. Instead one person sees the other in terms of their being over against each other; each sees the other as divided from himself or herself.”

The daily news shows people against each other, even violently so. Love is not our natural inclination. Only God can help. God help us!

## The Center of the Gospel

The center of the gospel—“redemption” is the word around which everything turns. (8:422)



On June 6, 1944, the day of the Allied landing on Normandy, Bonhoeffer wrote to his friend Eberhard Bethge from prison. He mentioned the *Daily Text*, a series of biblical texts for each day of the year. On this day, the texts were Psalm 38:4 and Ephesians 1:7. Bonhoeffer said these texts call us to “the center of the gospel—‘redemption’ is the word around which everything turns.”

Psalm 38 is the psalmist’s prayer for healing. He confesses his sin and says, “My iniquities have gone over my head; they weigh like a burden too heavy for me” (Psalm 38:4). The whole psalm pleads for God’s help, concluding with the appeal, “O my God do not be far from me; make haste to help me, O Lord, my salvation” (Psalm 38:21b-22).

This plea for help and healing is met by God’s coming near to all people in the person of God’s Son, Jesus Christ. As Paul said, “In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of our trespasses, according to the riches of his grace” (Ephesians 1:7).

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*Redemption*—that word is the center of the gospel, “the word around which everything turns,” wrote Bonhoeffer. God has sent Jesus Christ to die on the cross, so that through him, sinners can be redeemed. In Christ is redemption—just what the psalmist and all of us need! By God’s grace in Jesus Christ, our sin is forgiven, our lives are made new, and our burdens are lifted—for which the psalmist prayed. The good news of the gospel is liberation! The power of sin is broken, and we are free to serve God in Christ and to serve all other children of God. Redemption!

5

## The Holy Spirit Brings Christ

The Holy Spirit brings Christ to individuals (Romans 8:14; Ephesians 2:22) and establishes community among them. (2 Corinthians 13:13; Philippians 2:1) (1:139)



**T**he work of the Holy Spirit is mysterious. The New Testament says much of what the Spirit does. But unless we stop to think and observe, we may miss what the Spirit is doing.

Bonhoeffer cites a number of Scripture passages to remind us that one of the primary works of the Holy Spirit is to bring Christ into our lives. Paul wrote that “all who are led by the Spirit of God are children of God” (Romans 8:14). We become “children of God” by faith, and faith is given to us as a gift of God through the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 2:8). We know Jesus Christ today because God’s Spirit has been at work within us.

But the Spirit does more. Bonhoeffer notes that along with bringing Christ to individuals, the Spirit “establishes community among them.” The Spirit brings together all who have faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. This is what the Apostles’ Creed calls the “communion of saints,”

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or the “church.” Bonhoeffer’s doctoral dissertation was called *Sanctorum Communio*, “the communion of saints.” The church community we see around us as we worship and in which we participate as people who confess their faith in Jesus Christ is established by Christ’s action through the work of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit creates the community of those who have responded to Christ’s call to be his disciples.

Our faith is strengthened when we realize we become children of God by the Spirit’s work in bringing Christ to us. The church, as the work of the Spirit, is the community where our identity as Christ’s disciples is expressed and lived!

6

## Justification and Sanctification

Justification is the new creation of the new person, and sanctification is the preservation and protection of that person until the day of Jesus Christ. (4:260)



An important image to describe salvation is justification. Paul writes that “since we are justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1). Bonhoeffer articulates his Lutheran tradition in which *justification* refers to “the new creation of the new person.” Justification gives us a new standing of being (declared) righteous before God, based on the death of Jesus Christ. Those justified by faith in Jesus Christ are incorporated into the body of Christ, the “church community.” For Bonhoeffer, justification, like baptism, is a “once and for all,” unrepeatable event. Justification means we are “in Christ,” we are a “new creation” (2 Corinthians 5:17). Now our sin is forgiven, our past is over and gone, and we are liberated from the power of sin to condemn us in God’s sight. For Bonhoeffer, Christ has obeyed the law of God on our behalf, and through faith, we receive Christ’s righteousness as being for us. In justification, we are “set right” with God. We are saved.

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Bonhoeffer says *sanctification* describes the “preservation and safekeeping unto the day of Jesus Christ” of those who are justified. By God’s Holy Spirit, the justified grow in faith throughout life and are enabled to stay close to Jesus Christ. Now we are continually promised God’s present and future action through the Spirit to help us fulfill God’s will in our daily lives. The Spirit preserves us in faith and, like Noah’s ark, preserves us through the floods of life and brings us safely to our ultimate salvation (1 Thessalonians 5:23; 1 Peter 1:5).

Praise to God who saves us and preserves us in Jesus Christ!

## Forgiving the Sins of the World

The world exhausts its rage on the body of Jesus Christ. But the martyred one forgives the world its sins. Thus reconciliation takes place. *Ecce homo* ["Here is the man!" (John 19:5)]. (6:83)



Jesus Christ brings the reconciliation of the world to God. As Paul proclaims about Christ: “through him God was pleased to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, by making peace through the blood of his cross” (Colossians 1:20). We cannot imagine a greater act of God on our behalf—all through Jesus Christ.

Bonhoeffer emphasized that God takes on our sin and forgives the sins of the world in Jesus Christ. Jesus brings reconciliation between sinful, guilty humans and the God who loves us. Bonhoeffer wrote, “The world exhausts its rage on the body of Jesus Christ. But the martyred one forgives the world its sins. Thus reconciliation takes place. *Ecce homo*.” Despite all that sin could do to Jesus—even bringing his death—Jesus forgives: “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). Jesus absorbs human guilt and the suffering guilt has brought. In Jesus, holiness absorbs sin; love overcomes

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hate. The world is not overcome by destruction. It is forgiven through reconciliation. This is what theologians call “atone-ment.” God and humanity are “at-one” by the death of Jesus Christ on the cross. Here is “the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29).

The only one who can bring this reconciliation is Jesus Christ, the eternal Son of God who became a human being to die for us. Jesus took our sins upon himself. This is the gospel message to liberate our lives from the power of sin. We are forgiven. Now we have peace with God. In Jesus, God shows overflowing love for us!

8

## The Meaning of the Easter Message

The meaning of the *Easter* message is that God is the death of death; God lives and so Christ lives also; death could not hold Christ against the superior power of God. God pronounced a decree against death, destroyed it, and resurrected Jesus Christ. (10:488)



Some have called 1 Corinthians 15 the “spinal cord of the New Testament.” It is Paul’s great chapter on resurrection. Paul proclaimed the resurrection of Jesus Christ and our own resurrection as believers in Christ. All the future comes to this: “If Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile and you are still in your sins” (1 Corinthians 15:17).

But because Christ is raised, the power of death has been defeated. The power of sin is broken now, and resurrection life awaits. This is the Easter promise. As Bonhoeffer put it in a sermon, “The meaning of the *Easter* message is that God is the death of death; God lives and so Christ lives also; death could not hold Christ against the superior power of God. God pronounced a decree against death, destroyed it, and resurrected Jesus Christ.”

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Jesus Christ is alive! Death could not hold him. Christ is raised by the power of God. As we confess in the Apostles' Creed, "the third day he rose again from the dead." This opens an eternal future for the dead, who will be raised, and for us who are living to know we have an eternal future freed from sin and alive forever in Christ Jesus.

Bonhoeffer's focus on God's providing "the death of death" in the resurrection of Christ gives hope. This Easter message is a message for our lives every day. We can live in assurance that the worst that can be done to us—death—is conquered in Christ!

## The Nearby God

Remember, I am with you . . . that is the Easter message,  
not the distant, but the nearby God, that is Easter.  
(10:491)



When Bonhoeffer served as a pastoral assistant in a Lutheran congregation in Barcelona, Spain, he preached on the first Sunday after Easter, April 15, 1928. His sermon addressed a basic human question: Can we walk with God?

The great gulf between God and humans is caused by sin. This is the story Bonhoeffer described in his book *Creation and Fall*. Genesis 3 tells of humanity's rebellion against God and that Adam and Eve—representing all of us—were expelled from the garden of Eden. The relationship of loving trust they had with God since their creation was broken. Sin did its worst the day Jesus hung on the cross. The distance between sinful humans and their creator could not be greater than on Good Friday.

But Bonhoeffer told the congregation there was a divine response to this sin. There was a day when humanity was filled with divine grace: Easter! This was the day Jesus Christ

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was raised from the dead. Now Jesus is with us, always (Matthew 28:20). Bonhoeffer proclaimed, “Remember, I am with you . . . that is the Easter message, not the distant, but the nearby God, that is Easter.”

Now the distance between us and God has been overcome. Now our relationship of loving trust is restored. Jesus Christ has reconciled us with God, our sin is forgiven, and now God is with us. Now we can walk with God because God is “the nearby God.” God is with us in Jesus Christ.

This Easter message is for the whole world to hear and believe! Since God is nearby—with us in Jesus Christ—we can keep our eyes open to see where we encounter Jesus among us.

## The Christian and the Worldly Become One in Christ

Just as in Jesus Christ God and humanity became one, so through Christ what is Christian and what is worldly become one in the action of the Christian. (6:238)



**B**onhoeffer’s theology focused on Jesus Christ and what God did in Christ for the sake of the world. The words of John the Baptist expressed who Jesus was and what Jesus would do. John said, “Here is the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world!” (John 1:29). Jesus, the Son of God, offered himself in his death for the forgiveness of sins to take away “the sin of the world.” This unites God and humanity through what Jesus Christ did for the sake of the world God loves (John 3:16).

Bonhoeffer emphasized the concrete nature of what Jesus did—he lived and died in the real world, with real people, as a real person. Jesus’ life and work was for the sake of the world and all people.

This carries over into what Christians do today. We serve Jesus Christ in the world. Our mission and ministries of

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discipleship in following Jesus take place in the here and now. Christians are the most “worldly” of people! Why? Because Jesus Christ became a human person and died for the sin of this world. Bonhoeffer wrote, “Just as in Jesus Christ God and humanity became one, so through Christ what is Christian and what is worldly become one in the action of the Christian.”

Critics of Christianity have said Christianity offers “pie in the sky by and by.” They see Christianity as an “other-worldly faith.” But the emphasis of the Gospel we proclaim is that “what is Christian and what is worldly” are united in us—because of Jesus Christ!

1 1

## The Ascended Christ Is Close to Us

He is close to us in his church, in his Word, in his sacrament, in love among the brethren. Here he comforts us who are abandoned; here he soothes our homesickness ever anew; here he takes us who are estranged from God, who are in barren, empty places, who don't know the way, who are alone, and makes us joyful in his Christly presence.... That is the joy of the believing church in its unseen, heavenly Lord. (12:469)



**A**scension Day is the fortieth day of Easter, the day the church remembers the ascension of Jesus into heaven (Acts 1:6-11). Ascension Day is very important, even though it often passes nearly unnoticed in our churches and in our lives of faith. Bonhoeffer preached an Ascension Day sermon on May 25, 1933, in Berlin in which he spoke movingly of the joy of Christ's ascension.

He noted that Martin Luther once commented that while Christ was on earth, Jesus was far away from us—limited to one place. But now that Christ is ascended to heaven, he is very close to us all the time. Christ is close to us in the

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church, through Word and sacrament, and in the love the church community shares. Every day!

Then, movingly, Bonhoeffer said that here on earth, Jesus “comforts us who are abandoned; here he soothes our homesickness ever anew; here he takes us who are estranged from God, who are in barren, empty places, who don’t know the way, who are alone, and makes us joyful in his Christly presence. . . . That is the joy of the believing church in its unseen, heavenly Lord.”

We can be grateful that Jesus “ascended into heaven” (Apostles’ Creed). Now he is close to us to bring us joy—no matter what our sorrow or situation!

1 2

## God Has a Purpose

God is concerned not only with the nations, but has a purpose for every community no matter how small, every friendship, every marriage, every family. And in this sense God also has a purpose for the *church*. (1:119)



**T**hroughout the Bible, God calls people. God calls groups of people and individual persons.

God calls people to carry out God's purposes in the world. Those who respond to God's call are enlisted in God's service. They devote themselves to what God calls them to do to accomplish the divine will in the world. God chose the people of Israel and said, "I... will be your God, and you shall be my people" (Leviticus 26:12). Jesus called his disciples: "Follow me and I will make you fish for people" (Mark 1:17). God works in and through people to accomplish God's will in the world.

Bonhoeffer recognized this when he wrote that "God is concerned not only with the nations, but has a purpose for every community no matter how small, every friendship,

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every marriage, every family. And in this sense God also has a purpose for the *church*.”

All groups and individuals called by God receive God’s blessings but also have responsibilities to carry out God’s will and purposes. Communities and all persons must repent of their sins against God, believe, and carry out God’s word according to God’s call. Collectively, every community stands before God to be faithful—or unfaithful—to the call God gives. Individuals, in all our relationships—friendship, marriage, and families—have our decisions about ways to live out the purposes for which God has called us. The church’s great purpose is to be the community in which Christ exists and that carries out Christ’s purposes to meet human needs. Live out God’s purpose!

1 3

## Faith Believes Only in God

This is faith: it does not rely on itself or on favorable seas, favorable conditions; it does not rely on its own strength or on other people's strength, but believes only and alone in God, whether or not there is a storm. ...Lord, make this faith strong in us who have little faith! (12:460)



**T**he story of Jesus quieting the storm is an enacted story of faith and its challenges (Matthew 8:23-27).

The disciples were in a boat with Jesus. A storm arose, and the boat was swamped with waves. Jesus was asleep. The disciples woke him in fear. Jesus asked, "Why are you afraid, you of little faith?" Then Jesus rebuked the winds and the sea was "dead calm." The disciples were amazed.

Bonhoeffer preached a sermon on this story on January 15, 1933, in Berlin during a time of great tension. This was shortly before Hitler came to power, and there were many political fears.

But Bonhoeffer's message was that we can have faith instead of fear. "This is faith," he said: "It does not rely on itself or on favorable seas, favorable conditions; it does not

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rely on its own strength or on other people's strength, but believes only and alone in God, whether or not there is a storm....Lord, make this faith strong in us who have little faith!"

Faith is trust. It is trust in Jesus, even when he seems to be asleep in the boat. Through all conditions of life—in calm seas or dangerous seas, faith trusts in Jesus. It does not rely on its own strength. Faith believes only in God. Faith overcomes fear because God saves those who are perishing. We are people of "little faith." But Jesus is with us. He can calm our fears. He gives us faith.

## Lord of the Ages

The Lord of the ages is God. The turning point of the ages is Christ. The true spirit of the age [*Zeitgeist*] is the Holy Spirit. (10:531)



**B**onhoeffer's great-grandfather was Karl August von Hase. He was a distinguished church historian who wrote the *History of the Christian Church*. A theme of that book was "The Lord of the ages is God. The turning point of the ages is Christ. The true spirit of the age [*Zeitgeist*] is the Holy Spirit."

This trinitarian description provides a theological view of history. Though we live our life histories one day at a time, in the great vision of history presented in the Bible, we acknowledge that God is "the Lord of the ages." God is the Lord of history who guides history and is the One to whom all history will ultimately bow.

Jesus Christ is the "turning point of the ages." Christ has come, and the world is changed. Now salvation is possible. Now the decisive story in history is the story of Jesus Christ and the redemption he brings to the world.

## *Mornings with Bonhoeffer*

The Holy Spirit is “the true spirit of the age.” This meant, for Bonhoeffer, that despite all the tragedies, miseries, and sin in the world—which he saw in the diabolical evil of Nazism—God’s Spirit is the “true spirit of the age” because God’s Spirit is at work in the world through all sin and evil.

This is the future vision of Revelation when the “loud voices in heaven” proclaim, “The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of his Messiah, and he will reign forever and ever” (Revelation 11:15). This vision pulls us forward in this age and every age as we anticipate the final triumph of God’s reign!