

Hold Up Your Brother!

Helping Each Other Endure To The End

By John Piper & Dietrich Bonhoeffer

Hello, Friend!

One of the most distracting situations you can come across at camp is the conflict between or among Staff members. Whether you've been in such a situation yourself, or have viewed it from the outside, you know how draining, disheartening, and frustrating it can be. While conflict between humans is ultimately unavoidable, I believe that the root of such conflict can be chopped down by a changed perspective!

Friend, your fellow Counselors aren't your competition. They aren't your focus. And they aren't your enemies.

In this fight, especially at camp, we are fighting against real enemies - the powers of darkness, distractions, and most of all, OURSELVES! When you're fighting this fight, entrenched in the battle, you'll want your brothers to stand with you. And when they struggle, I pray that you'll be strongly rooted in Christ and able to help them in turn!

Turn your focus to the battle at hand, and to the Lord Who that has saved you! In this light, conflict with those beside you will shrink in proportion. You need these fellow fighters, even if your pride might hinder you from realizing it. I pray that you'll place them in their proper spot; Your Family in Christ.

There is no greater bond. Strengthen it, protect it, and nourish it, and it will support you in the days of hardship!

(While this article applies to the small troop of soldiers coming to camp this summer, it also applies to the relationships you'll be cultivating with fellow Believers in all areas of your life. Don't just apply it to camp! Take it with you!)

In Christ, The Upon The Rock Staff

Fifty years ago, evangelicals in Germany formed what became known as the Confessing Church. They opposed the German Christian Church Movement sponsored by the Nazis between 1933 and 1945. As Nazi dominance increased, the Confessing Church was forced underground, and in 1935 the Confessing Church formed a preachers' seminary near Zingst on the Baltic Sea, which soon moved to Finkenwalde.

The principal and main teacher of the twenty-five students was Dietrich Bonhoeffer, a 29-year-old pastor and university professor from Berlin. Bonhoeffer led the students in a disciplined life together that included daily prayers, meditation, worship, study, recreation, and work. All the seminarians knew they lived on the edge of eternity in those frightening days.

In September 1937 the seminary was closed by the Nazi police, and in November the seminarians were put under arrest. That same year Bonhoeffer published a book entitled, *The Cost of Discipleship*, and in September of 1938 put in book form the lessons of Finkenwalde entitled, *Life Together*.

Here we have insights into how to be Christians in a community when life is being lived on the brink

Bonhoeffer's little book, *Life Together*, is a word for our times because we are plagued in America by a kind of laissez-faire Christianity that lacks the vigorous camaraderie and discipline that unites a kingdom in wartime.

We don't have a wartime mentality and therefore our young men and women do not gather late at night in basement rooms and plot their strategies to detonate Satan's bridgehead and liberate some of his captives. We don't see ourselves as insurgents in the alien territory of sin planting explosives of righteousness and truth at every fortified wall; and so our eyes don't meet with a flame of eternal friendship on Nicollet Mall and say without a word amid a thousand aliens: "You and I will die for this cause and join hands in the resurrection."

We don't feel like a fifth column devoted with all our strength to sabotage the rule of Satan in this world; and therefore our life together is not intense but petty. There are no coded handshakes of joy, or secret passwords. And there are few tearful embraces and songs of thanks because a squad of witnesses has returned safely even bringing some liberated captives home.

Bonhoeffer's words about "life together" have the ring of authenticity for us because they were written not at the nerve center of comfort but on the brink. They have the taste of radical commitment that all of us dream about, many of us crave, and only a few pursue. He wrote,

The physical presence of other Christians is a source of incomparable joy and strength to the believer . . . It is true, of course, that what is an unspeakable gift for the lonely individual is easily disregarded and trodden underfoot by those who have the gift every day . . . (Life Together 8)

Then Bonhoeffer comes to a very solemn point that I want to emphasize. He writes,

If somebody asks [a Christian], *where is your salvation and your righteousness*, he can never point to himself. He points to the Word of God in Jesus Christ, which assures him of salvation and righteousness. He is as alert as possible to this Word. Because he daily hungers and thirsts for righteousness, he daily desires the redeeming Word . . .

But God has put this Word into the mouth of men in order that it may be communicated to other men. When one person is struck by the Word, he speaks it to others. God has willed that we should seek and find His living Word in the witness of a brother, in the mouth of a man. Therefore, the Christian needs another Christian who speaks God's Word to him. He needs him again and again when he becomes uncertain and discouraged, for by himself he cannot help himself without belying the truth. He needs his brother man as a bearer and proclaimer of the divine word of salvation. He needs his brother solely because of Jesus Christ. The Christ in his own heart is weaker than the Christ in the word of his brother; his own heart is uncertain; his brother's is sure. (Life Together, 11–12)

If we knew that the Gestapo was closing in on us, if we knew that at any time some could disappear from our number never to be heard from again, we would gather often in our homes and in secret rendezvous to strengthen our hands in God. And love would cover a multitude of sins, and our handshakes and embraces and the meetings of our eyes would be like gifts of roses and lilies from the bottom of the heart.

Well, we are in wartime. We are in enemy territory. Thousands of lives hang in the balance. The danger of hard hearts and unbelief and cool love and American luxury lurks everywhere. Oh, how we need to exhort one another every day to have strong confidence of victory in Christ, and to dream of new strategies of love to sabotage the enemy's concentration camps of unbelief!

John 15:9-17

“As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love. If you keep my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commands and remain in his love. I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete. My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you. Greater love has no one than this: to lay down one’s life for one’s friends. You are my friends if you do what I command. I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master’s business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you. You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you so that you might go and bear fruit—fruit that will last—and so that whatever you ask in my name the Father will give you. This is my command: Love each other.

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Questions For Digging Deeper

ANSWER THESE AFTER YOU READ THE ARTICLE

1. Please examine the Scriptures and write down some examples of how Christ views loving one another/taking care of one another/helping on another.

2. When you think about conflicts you've had in the past, did you have valid reasons for being upset? Take these conflicts and apply the Truth of God's Word to it. If you believe you acted incorrectly, how could you have acted differently?

3. What steps are you going to take to keep yourself from falling into conflict with your brothers and sisters?

4. If you have a chance to counsel somebody in conflict with another counselor, how would you approach that? What would you encourage them to do?

5. In the preface to the article, I mentioned that most conflict can be changed at the root by a shifted perspective. To avoid conflict, what must we turn our focus from? What must we turn our focus *to*?

6. If you become engaged in conflict at camp, how would you go about repairing the conflict? What steps would you take to reconcile the relationship after the conflict was over?

Please be diligent in prayer, preparing your heart to go into battle with your fellow Believers. Living in a community under close quarters, with little sleep, and with lots of different difficulties can definitely be challenging. But it has the possibility of becoming Heaven on Earth! We'll be praying that God can lead us into complete unity with each other in His Spirit, and that our love can grow stronger each day!

Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. ¹³ Bear with each other and forgive one another if any of you has a grievance against someone. Forgive as the Lord forgave you.¹⁴ And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity. ¹⁵ Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, since as members of one body you were called to peace. And be thankful. ¹⁶ Let the message of Christ dwell among you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all wisdom through psalms, hymns, and songs from the Spirit, singing to God with gratitude in your hearts. ¹⁷ And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

Colossians