**23rd July 2023**

**Call to worship**

God has been with us through the week just gone,
in all the joys and all the sorrows.
Let us come together and worship God
as creator and sustainer of all things,
and our constant companion in all things.

**A gathering prayer**

Almighty God, thank you for all the times and places
where we have seen you at work this week.
Come and reveal yourself to us again now,
that we might be strengthened in our faith
and renewed in our trust of you.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of approach**

Lord God, we picture ourselves as a field of strong wheat
reaching up to the sun, the giver of life.
Yet the sun also gives life to weeds;
and there are weeds among us and within us,
people and personality traits that hinder the growth of your kingdom.
So, we come before you in humility to learn of your wisdom.
Are we more weeds than wheat today?
As individuals and as a community,
challenge our attitudes and renew our perspective, we pray.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of adoration**

Almighty God, all-seeing and all-knowing,
with confidence we accept your power and authority,
knowing that we can always trust in your judgement;
for your loving nature pervades creation,
and all shall be well – all shall be well.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of confession and an Assurance of forgiveness**

**A prayer of confession**

Lord, we confess that we are quick to decide who are the weeds among us;
mostly, we think they are whoever is outside these walls,
and maybe one or two here with whom we disagree in some way.
We, of course, are wheat; so, we raise ourselves high,
while casting our brothers and sisters down in our harsh judgement.
But you, Lord, see the wheat and the weeds within each one of us,
the good and the bad battling for space to grow.
Forgive us, Father, for the less-than-Christian thoughts and
attitudes we allow to take hold of our souls, smothering the
good growth you have nurtured within us.
Help us to accept that we all have our failings,
and so it is right that we should all be given a chance, for you
are the only one who sees everything and is fit to judge.
We humbly ask your mercy, O Lord.
**Amen.**

**Assurance of forgiveness**

God the creator and re-creator,
constant in your care for your creatures and creation,
you forgive us time and time again
when the thoughts and attitudes that choke our faith
spring up to darken the light and love of your grace within us.
We thank you that we can trust your judgement
and rely on your forgiveness in all circumstances.
**Amen.**

**A prayer of praise and thanksgiving**

Loving God, who permits wheat and weeds to grow together,
allowing light and nurture to both,
we thank you for your patience and forbearance
with your fallen and faltering children.
We do not notice the things within us that
choke our spiritual growth, shutting out your light,
yet we are quick to spot them in others.
We thank you for your slowness to condemn us,
praising you for your unmerited mercy and grace,
for all are sinners and have fallen short.
**Amen.**

Picture a garden border full of brightly coloured summer growth: are we certain that we know what is weed and what is plant? Someone said that weeds are just plants in the wrong place (which also begs the question: by whose definition of ‘wrong’?). How can we make sense of what Jesus says here about good crops and bad crops? Is it possible to turn weeds into wheat through what we say and how we live in our communities?

If you have a garden or allotment, a great deal of time and effort will be spent weeding it. We might use weedkiller or weed burners or good old-style hoeing to rid ourselves of unwanted plants, and need to repeat this regularly. The sower’s approach in Jesus’ story seems to run against our gardening instincts in allowing the weeds to remain. They will share the resources of the wheat as they grow alongside it. They may even grow more vigorously than the wheat but, come the harvest, their fate is sealed. When something bad happens, we often want justice straight away, we want the situation dealt with immediately. The implication here is that God doesn’t work like that. Justice and judgement belongs to God, but in God’s time. Our responsibility is to be wheat, and leave the rest up to God.

The weeds are planted by ‘an enemy’ – identified in the story as ‘the devil’. In Jesus’ time, fields were not separated by hedgerows or walls but marked by boundary stones. A rival farmer could easily sow weeds in a neighbour’s field to reduce their crop and to ensure a better return for their own produce. Is there a parallel for us in the way we often compete with neighbours, colleagues or even family members, and might occasionally find ourselves on the wrong end of someone’s action to restrict our progress? Does Jesus’ story caution against any ideas of ‘revenge against the enemy’ in such circumstances?

**Thought for the week**

When I was younger, I was promised a trip at the weekend to a swimming pool with water slides. Every day I asked my parents, ‘Are we going today?’ even though I was getting ready for school. This was followed by ‘Are we definitely going on Saturday?’ My parents became increasingly frustrated by my questions, replying, ‘We’ve said that we will take you. Be patient.’ By the end of the week that became, ‘We won’t go if you ask us one more time.’ My questions showed a lack of trust on my part. I was so excited to go on this trip that I wanted to make absolutely certain it was happening, and nearly stopped it from happening in the process.

The sower in Jesus’ story is affected by an enemy that sows the weeds, but the sower’s control over the fields, and his power ultimately to rule on the fate of everything there, is never challenged. God is God – there is no other – and God has promised to bless people and to rule the world with justice. When we become anxious at our struggles or the relative successes of those who work by less honest paths, we betray a lack of trust in God’s goodness and power to fulfil those promises. Spending too much time looking at the weeds that distract or threaten us stops us from seeing the full majesty of God and knowing that we can trust God to give us all that we need. Jesus reminds us that God is in control and that, in the words of St Julian of Norwich, ‘All shall be well, and all shall be well, and all manner of thing shall be well’.

Active worship

Spot the difference

AA simple game to get you thinking.

You will need: images of weeds and non-weed plants (or, some potted examples).

* Show each image and ask, ‘Weed or not-a-weed?’ Ask people to indicate their answer by a show of hands. Reveal the answers at the end of the game. Start with easy ones then make them more difficult – there are some beautiful ‘weeds’!
* How easy is it to spot the ‘weeds’ in our lives? Can you think of examples where it is difficult to distinguish? Do you ever classify something as ‘weed’ when perhaps you should not have done?
E

**A simple worship activity**

Exploring what makes faith difficult in daily living.

You will need: sheets of paper (pale green is ideal), scissors, pens.

* Cut sheets of paper into irregular wavy strips to represent weeds. Ask people to name (to themselves; or working in twos/threes) any problems or issues that are ‘growing in their field’ – i.e. in their lives, particularly as they try to live as a disciple of Jesus. What makes faith harder? Write, or draw something to represent these issue on the ‘weeds’.
* After a while, invite everyone to bring these up to the front and place them in a basket or bowl, or on the floor or a table in front of a cross, as a symbol of lying them before God, the one we can trust and turn to in all circumstances.
W E A

**Good weed, bad weed**

**Explore how weeds can sometimes work for good.**

You will need: a white board or large sheet of paper, marker pens

* Invite people to name some weeds that they’ve seen or know about. Write these on the board. In each case, ask (and record on the board, colour-coded if possible): what makes the plant a weed – or, rather, what makes it bad? Does it also have any good features? Is there another plant that perhaps counteracts the ‘bad’ of the first one – for example, nettles sting, but can be eaten and make good tea (apparently), and a dock leaf can calm the sting. A thistle is a weed too, but also the emblem of Scotland because its prickles gave away the presence of the enemy in a battle; deadly nightshade is poisonous, but can be used to make medicine.
* Can anyway one think of any parallels in human life – e.g. do any of the ‘weeds’ in our lives, as identified earlier (see *A simple worship activity*) have redeeming features?
W E

**Matthew 13.24-30,36-43**

Jesus tells a parable about the kingdom of God, and provides its explanation: that evil and its agents in the world will persist alongside the good, despite the coming of the kingdom of God that Jesus was proclaiming.

Jesus gives us another seed-related story to help us think about the difficulties and struggles we endure while seeking to live as God intends us to. Through it we have our gaze lifted to contemplate God’s power and are reminded that God is worthy of our trust.

This section (vv.24-43) is a bit like a sandwich. The ‘filling’ is the two short parables in verses 31-33 (not in our reading) accompanied by Matthew’s explanation of why Jesus spoke in parables. The ‘bread’ is the parable of the weeds and its explanation. The parable appears only in Matthew, and it tells a story that would have been familiar to many of Jesus’ original audience. Roman Law dealt with such agricultural sabotage quite severely, suggesting that it was fairly common.

And, it’s a simple story: a farmer has sown wheat in a field. At night a rival, wanting to gain an advantage in the marketplace, sows weeds. The wise farmer knows that as the weeds grow, their roots and those of the wheat will intertwine, so he can’t risk pulling them up ahead of the harvest because he’ll lose everything. So, he waits. At harvest time, the weeds are cut first – now easily identifiable – and then the wheat. That way most of the crop can be salvaged. The focus of the parable is not so much on the nature of the wheat and the weeds as on their fate. Jesus tells his disciples that a good harvest is a certainty, the wheat will be separated from the weeds and the children of the kingdom will shine as they perfectly reflect the glory of the Father.

Daniel 7 and 12 lies behind this parable: ‘the Son of Man’ is introduced in Daniel 7:13-14 as one who is given all authority and comes to reign over the kingdom of God (hence v.41; the idea of the Son of Man having the kingdom is unique to Matthew). It is this that gives the parable it’s world-embracing focus.

Everyone wanted the kingdom to come now. The disciples were excited because Jesus had told them that it was here now. They wanted it in all its glory, but Jesus says that we’ll have to wait and live (for an unspecified time) cheek by jowl with those who do not share their view of the world, who are often hostile to it. But this waiting is the flipside of the coin of God’s mercy. God doesn’t want to swiftly judge people. God wants everyone to repent, and waits patiently for them to respond to the good news. Our lives in the present are lived in the light of this future and lent some urgency by that. So, all we’ve learned about mission over the past weeks needs to be heard in the light of this solemn reminder that we don’t have all the time in the world.

**Dietrich Bonhoeffer**

Controversial figure who tried to witness to the gospel in a world that was being overcome by evil.

Bonhoeffer was born on 4 February 1906 in [Breslau](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wroclaw), then Germany (now Poland), into a large family.[[3]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-3) In addition to his other siblings, Dietrich had a twin sister, [Sabine Bonhoeffer Leibholz](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bonhoeffer_family): he and Sabine were the sixth and seventh children out of eight.[[4]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:12-4) His father was [Karl Bonhoeffer](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Bonhoeffer), a psychiatrist and neurologist, noted for his criticism of [Sigmund Freud](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigmund_Freud);[[5]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:22-5) and his mother Paula Bonhoeffer was a teacher and the granddaughter of Protestant theologian [Karl von Hase](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karl_Hase) and painter [Stanislaus von Kalckreuth](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stanislaus_von_Kalckreuth).[[6]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-6) Bonhoeffer's family dynamic and his parents' values enabled him to receive a high level of education and encouraged his curiosity, which impacted his ability to lead others around him, specifically in the church setting.[[7]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-7)  They had holiday house in Bohemian borders. They had an idyllic childhood. They had good religious education and Christian values to be lived out with good resolution. Yet Karl the father didn’t believe Christian faith and they didn’t actually go to church. Yet their nannies did and gave them a scriptural foundation

Walter Bonhoeffer, the second born of the Bonhoeffer family, was killed in action during [World War I](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/World_War_I) when Bonhoeffer was 12 years old.[[9]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-9) It impacted the family greatly, especially his mother. Dietrich kept Walters bible for the rest of his life. The family realized they could have pulled strings to ensure their sons weren’t conscripted but they had been overtaken by nationalistic pride for the war. Dietrichs’s pacifist ideals maybe stemmed from this experience.

At age 14, Bonhoeffer decided to pursue his education in theology despite the criticism of his older brothers and parents who wanted him to pursue music. He already was a competent pianist by this age.

Bonhoeffer began his studies at Tübingen and eventually moved to the University of Berlin

Germany had been defeated in the first world war and the treaty of Versailles was humiliating and hard. People looked for someone to blame. Had the communists stabbed then in the back, the Kaiser had abdicated, inflation was out of control. Dietrich had sent word back from college: could you please send more money I have had to spend 6 thousand Marks on a loaf of bread.

Bonhoeffer pursued theology not because of any deep Christian faith and relationship with God but because theology in that day and age was a philosophy and learned. Yet he went to a meeting led by the brother of William Booth the Salvation Army founder and he was moved by how people expressed their living faith in God.

In [1930](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/1930) Bonhoeffer moved to America with the interest of attaining a Sloane Fellowship at New York City's [Union Theological Seminary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Theological_Seminary_%28New_York_City%29).[[14]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:122-14) Bonhoeffer was greatly unimpressed with American theology. He described the students as lacking interest in theology and would "laugh out loud" when learning a passage from Luther's Sin and Forgiveness.[[15]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:222-15)  Bonhoeffer came feeling superior academically but one of his students Frank Fisher , an African American introduced Bonhoeffer to his church in Harlem. There were 14,000 people attending to worship. Dietrcih was impacted by their simplicity and joy and heard the gospel preached in a straight forward way. He was very noticeable with his blond hair and blue eyes but he was welcomed. He loved the music and bought records of the spirituals and brought them home to Germany. The reality of converted lives struck him. Because of the racial issues in America he saw the injustices of the day and how segregation impacted on the African American.

He wrote to his brother and sisters it is unbelievable to see this racial prejudice as well as the ineptitude of churches to bring about integration.[[17]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-17). We have nothing like this in Germany nothing to compare. Ironic considering what the next years would hold. As he arrived in America he wasn’t aware of what happening in Germany. The election results were shocking. A tiny party with only 12 members became the largest party of the nation. It was the Nazi party led by Adolf Hitler.

He returned to Berlin and started attending a church. He took communion, which he had never done before. In fact his family noticed a change in him. He was always interested in philosophy and theology but now difference to him. His students noticed a difference to him. He didn’t just want them to gain knowledge he wanted them to know God, to become disciples of Jesus.

 Bonhoeffer's promising academic and ecclesiastical career was dramatically knocked off course by the Nazi ascent to power on 30 January 1933. He was a determined opponent of the regime from its first days. Two days after Hitler was installed as Chancellor, Bonhoeffer delivered a radio address in which he attacked Hitler and warned Germany against slipping into an idolatrous cult of the [*Führer*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/F%C3%BChrer) (leader), who could very well turn out to be *Verführer* (misleader, or seducer). His broadcast was abruptly cut off, though it is unclear whether the newly elected Nazi regime was responsible.[[24]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-24) In April 1933, Bonhoeffer raised the first voice for church resistance to Hitler's persecution of Jews, declaring that the church must not simply "bandage the victims under the wheel, but jam a spoke in the wheel itself."[[25]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-25)

Hitler did not believe in God and was cynical of the church. He said Christianity was a meek and flabby religion. He hated the weakness it promoted. He said ‘ If you get all clergy in a room and you ask one question they will shrink in embarrassment’. Yet Germany was 100% Christian if nominal, so Hitler had to tread carefully.

There had been the foundation of the German church in the 1920s. Out of the war defeat they were more patriotic. Hitler offered his support to this German church. So many Christians did not notice the subtle changes and were throwing themselves behind this new church movement. They said the bible wasn’t from God. The Old Testament needed removing and the New testament edited. One of the leaders said the voice of God is the voice of the people. They completely changed all the doctrine. Hitler wanted a positive Christianity. Away with negative such as sin and the death of Christ. Focus on liberty, purification, freedom. They taught that God had chosen the Aryan people and their true saviour was Hitler. Christians were swept along with these changes.  They passed a resolution to apply the [Aryan paragraph](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Aryan_paragraph) within the church, meaning that pastors and church officials of Jewish descent were to be removed from their posts.

Few stood against this tidal wave washing over Germany. Bonhoeffer resisted them. He was joined by, [Martin Niemöller](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Martin_Niem%C3%B6ller) and they founded the *[Pfarrernotbund](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pfarrernotbund%22%20%5Co%20%22Pfarrernotbund)* (Pastors' Emergency League). Niemoller would be famous for his poem first they came:

*First*[*they came for the socialists*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Social_Democratic_Party_of_Germany#History)*, and I did not speak out—
     Because I was not a*[*socialist*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Socialist)*.*

*Then*[*they came for the trade unionists*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_unions_in_Germany#Enforced_political_conformity_during_National_Socialism)*, and I did not speak out—
     Because I was not a*[*trade unionist*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Trade_unionist)*.*

*Then*[*they came for the Jews*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_of_the_Jews_in_Germany#Jews_under_the_Nazis_(1933%E2%80%9345))*, and I did not speak out—
     Because I was not a*[*Jew*](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jew)*.*

*Then they came for me—and there was no one left to speak for me.*

The Pastors emergency league wanted to support the Jews who had been expelled. They wanted their fellow clergy to go on strike to ensure the truth of the gospel was still taught. Hitler banned bible colleges and seminaries that didn’t teach the German Church doctrines.

Within weeks of its founding, more than a third of German pastors had joined the Emergency League. It was the forerunner of the *[Bekennende Kirche](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bekennende_Kirche%22%20%5Co%20%22Bekennende%20Kirche)* (Confessing Church), which aimed to preserve traditional, Biblically based Christian beliefs and practices.[[31]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-31) The [Barmen Declaration](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Barmen_Declaration), drafted by Karl Barth in May 1934 and adopted by the Confessing Church, insisted that Christ, not the Führer, was the head of the church.[[32]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-ushmm-32) The adoption of the declaration has often been viewed as a triumph, although by estimate, only 20% of German pastors supported the Confessing Church.[[33]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-LittellLocke1990-33)

The Confessing Church needed to act. They set up secret bible colleges across the nation to ensure the truth of the gospel was still taught and the next generation would still know what a Christian was. Bonhoeffer was in London at this time doing ecumenical work trying to gain an alliance of anti Nazi supporters. He came back to Germany to be the head at an underground seminary in [Finkenwalde](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Szczecin-Zdroje%22%20%5Co%20%22Szczecin-Zdroje) for training Confessing Church pastors. As the Nazi suppression of the Confessing Church intensified, Karl Barth was driven back to Switzerland in 1935; Niemöller was arrested in July 1937; and in August 1936, Bonhoeffer's authorization to teach at the [University of Berlin](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Humboldt_University_of_Berlin) was revoked after he was denounced as a "[pacifist](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Pacifist) and enemy of the state" by Theodor Heckel.

At Finkenwalde he would ‘illegally’ teach pastors. He relished this opportunity to disciple young men to become leaders of the day. He was only 29 himself. They had to keep their heads down, but the village didn’t like Hitler and they supported Bonhoeffer and his young men. The local farmers kept them supplied with food. 23 students started at the college. Bonhoeffer was touched by the Sermon on the Mount. This was the key to how Christians should live together. His two most famous books Cost of Discipleship and Life Together were written out of this time.

He wrote ‘*When Christ calls a man he bids him come and die’. If we are serious for living for the Lord then live every aspect for Him. Our intellect, our reputation, our desires, our ideals.’*

He taught strict personal discipline. He wrote it is a privilege and a necessity for Christians to live together in community. It is living in and through Jesus Christ. Karl Barth said you are not running a monastery! But Dietrich believed in responsible and obedient action in connection to everyday life in private and in public. Bonhoeffer wanted to instill the truth of the gospel into these young men, as the churches were comprising the gospel to Nazism. Wanted them to go and make more disciples. He met his best friend at the college who would be his confidante and keep his letters and writings, Eberhard Bethge

Two years later the Gestapo found out about the seminary and they were closed down. More than half of the students would go on to be pastors and half of them killed in war.

In 1938 Hitler gave SS orders to kill and smash Jewish businesses. This began the next chapter for Bonhoeffer’s life. He had an inner restlessness what some called ‘Holy anger’. he marked in his bible a psalm. He wrote that to touch God’s people is to defy God - to touch God. How could he let this happen. War was mounting.

In February 1938, Bonhoeffer made an initial contact with members of the [German Resistance](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/German_resistance_to_Nazism) when his brother-in-law [Hans von Dohnányi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_von_Dohn%C3%A1nyi) introduced him to a group seeking Hitler's overthrow at the [Abwehr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Abwehr), the German military intelligence service.

Bonhoeffer also learned from Dohnányi that war was imminent. He was particularly troubled by the prospect of being conscripted. As a committed pacifist opposed to the Nazi regime, he could never swear an oath to Hitler and fight in his army, though refusal to do so was potentially a capital offense. He worried also about consequences his refusing military service could have for the Confessing Church, as it was a move that would be frowned upon by most Christians and their churches at the time.[[38]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-Dietrich_Bonhoeffer_p._19-38)

It was at this juncture that Bonhoeffer left for the United States in June 1939 at the invitation of [Union Theological Seminary](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Union_Theological_Seminary_%28New_York_City%29) in New York. Amid much inner turmoil, he soon regretted his decision and returned after two weeks[[42]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-42) despite strong pressures from his friends to stay in the United States. He wrote to [Reinhold Niebuhr](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Reinhold_Niebuhr):

I have come to the conclusion that I made a mistake in coming to America. I must live through this difficult period in our national history with the people of Germany. I will have no right to participate in the reconstruction of Christian life in Germany after the war if I do not share the trials of this time with my people ... Christians in Germany will have to face the terrible alternative of either willing the defeat of their nation in order that Christian civilization may survive or willing the victory of their nation and thereby destroying civilization. I know which of these alternatives I must choose but I cannot make that choice from security.[[43]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-43)

So he returned after just 26 days in the US. World War 2 was declared shortly after. [Hans von Dohnányi](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hans_von_Dohn%C3%A1nyi)  knew about the atrocities committed against the Jews, the concentration camps being set up.. He also heard about the edict that said the mid wives would have to kill any babies born with a defect or a disability. He collated evidence of all this knowing that it would take years for it to be brought to justice. He called it the Chronicle of Shame. Although he would be executed by the SS his chronicles were used in the post war trials.

DB already embroiled in so much conspiracy: brother in laws work, the secret seminaries and those working in inner circle resistance against Hitler. There were contradictions in Dietrich’s life. How could he support this duplicity and deceit. He wrote: ‘if I sit next to a mad man and he drives his car into innocent bystanders. As a Christian I can’t wait for the disaster to happen and then simply bury the dead and comfort the wounded. I must try to wrestle the steering wheel out of the hands of that driver’.

He realized he was in a unique position. He was so close to the driver in the passenger seat. He had a responsibility to this German people, indeed to the world. And to God’s people. He knew more that most about what Hitler doing. He could not in clear conscience remain inactive.

He said ‘silence in the face of evil is evil itself. Not to act is to act. Not to speak is to speak.’

Bonhoeffer joined the Abwehr, a German military intelligence organization. Dohnányi, already part of the Abwehr, brought him into the organization on the claim that his wide ecumenical contacts would be of use to Germany, thus protecting him from conscription to active service.[[44]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-nyrb-44)

Under cover of the Abwehr, Bonhoeffer served as a courier for the German resistance movement to reveal its existence and intentions to the Western Allies in hope of garnering their support, and, through his ecumenical contacts abroad, to secure possible peace terms with the Allies for a post-Hitler government. In May 1942, he met Anglican [Bishop George Bell](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Bishop_George_Bell) of Chichester, a member of the [House of Lords](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/House_of_Lords) and an ally of the Confessing Church, contacted by Bonhoeffer's exiled brother-in-law Leibholz; through him feelers were sent to British Foreign Secretary [Anthony Eden](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sir_Anthony_Eden). However, the British government ignored these, as it had all other approaches from the German resistance.[[48]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-48) Dohnányi and Bonhoeffer were also involved in Abwehr operations to help German Jews escape to Switzerland.

On 5 April 1943, Bonhoeffer and Dohnányi were arrested and imprisoned.

At this point he was engaged to Maria, a brilliant mathematician. Maria was support to him writing letters and supporting the Bonhoeffer family.

He had one thing with him which was his Bible. The discipline he had all his life he maintained in prison. Reading the scriptures. The prison guards realized they had someone of character and allowed him to write in prison. In prison he was pastor. He witnessed to the guards and led bible classes.

The wardens were won over by Bonhoeffer as a pure noble soul. They saw peace in him. They said he was like a country squire stepping out of his manor house so calm when came out of his prison cell. But he wrote poetry and about the fear and loneliness and how was he meant to live. There were times when he did not feel at peace and was afraid.

He wrote the poem Who am I?

Last line:

*Who am I ? They mock me these lonely questions of mine. Thou knowest of me God that I am thine*.

Nothing of the resistance had been discovered. They hoped Hitler would soon be dead and the war over. They communicated to each through codes and strong together messages.

On 4 April 1945, the diaries of Admiral [Wilhelm Canaris](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wilhelm_Canaris), head of the Abwehr, were discovered, and in a rage upon reading them, Hitler ordered that the Abwehr conspirators be destroyed.[[54]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-PlottingHitler-54) Bonhoeffer was led away just as he concluded his final Sunday service and asked an English prisoner, [Payne Best](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sigismund_Payne_Best), to remember him to Bishop George Bell of Chichester if he should ever reach his home: "This is the end—for me the beginning of life."[[5](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-Eberhard_Bethge_p._927-55)

Bonhoeffer was sentenced to death on 8 April 1945 at [Flossenbürg concentration camp](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Flossenb%C3%BCrg_concentration_camp%22%20%5Co%20%22Flossenb%C3%BCrg%20concentration%20camp).[[56]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-GermanResistance-56) He was executed there by hanging at dawn on 9 April 1945. Bonhoeffer was stripped of his clothing and led naked into the execution yard where he was hanged with six others:

[Eberhard Bethge](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eberhard_Bethge), writes of a man who saw the execution:

I saw Pastor Bonhoeffer... kneeling on the floor praying fervently to God. I was most deeply moved by the way this lovable man prayed, so devout and so certain that God heard his prayer. At the place of execution, he again said a short prayer and then climbed the few steps to the gallows, brave and composed. His death ensued after a few seconds. In the almost fifty years that I worked as a doctor, I have hardly ever seen a man die so entirely submissive to the will of God.[[55]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-Eberhard_Bethge_p._927-55)

He was 39 years old. Three weeks later Hitler killed himself. Week after that the war in Europe was over.

Many would see the tragedy of the death of Bonhoeffer just before the end of the war. Why was he taken right at the end. But Bonhoeffer would not see it as a tragedy. It was a privilege to give all to Christ. He used his God given gifts and the immense privileges to make a stand against the compromises of the church , for Gods people, the Jews, and stand with fellow believers to make sure they had strong foundations in the gospel.

Bonhoeffer argued that Christians should not retreat from the world but act within it. He believed that two elements were constitutive of faith: the implementation of justice and the acceptance of divine suffering.[[80]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-80) Bonhoeffer insisted that the church, like the Christians, "had to share in the sufferings of God at the hands of a godless world" if it were to be a true church of Christ. He called for religionless Christianity which has been subject to diverse and contradictory interpretations.

Bonhoeffer in his book Discipleship famously challenged the concept of cheap grace.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81) He communicates the idea of how Christians have relied too much on Christ's forgiveness that they do not challenge themselves enough in actually following his word to their best ability, instead relying on God's grace to catch them when they fall.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81)

Bonhoeffer says that Christians are instructed to strive to follow his word exactly, only then after we truly strive to the best of our ability should God's grace comes into play.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81) Cheap grace Bonhoeffer explains is a forgetting to strive in knowing that God's grace is there anyway. Bonhoeffer says this about cheap grace, "Cheap grace is the grace we bestow on ourselves, it is not a gift of God. Cheap grace is baptism without church discipline, it is communion without confession, it is “grace” without the cross".[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81)

Costly grace is the gospel that must be sought again and again. The door at which you must knock and knock. Such grace is costly. Because Christ calls us to follow. It is grace because it calls us to follow Jesus Christ. It is costly because it costs a man his life. It is grace because it gives a man his true life. Above all it is costly because it cost God his only Son. You were bought at a price. And what has cost God so much cannot be cheap for us.

Following off this idea, in Discipleship he also famously talked about the idea of simple obedience.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81) He admonishes Christians who come too quickly to the conclusion that God could not possibly have meant his commands literally.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81) Bonhoeffer uses the example of the rich man who asks Jesus how he can enter the kingdom of heaven.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81) Bonhoeffer says that Christians are too quick to assume that Jesus did not mean literally to leave everything and follow him, that instead, it was a heart matter or another reason.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81) Bonhoeffer says that God says exactly what he means, and that we need to follow simple obedience more by simply following Gods commands as they are said.[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81) He famously quotes that "only the obedient believe and only those who believe are obedient".[[81]](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer#cite_note-:0-81)

Written with reference to <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dietrich_Bonhoeffer>

**Prayers of intercession**

Merciful God, you call us and challenge us to live in the world, to be part of the world, to belong the world and now for the world we bring our prayers.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for the world’s people who go hungry though failure of crops, through bad land management or climate change, flood and drought, heat and cold, through the greed of others, through lack of money and resources. We pray for those who offer training and support to train others in food and farming, for those who run soup kitchens and food banks.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who hunger for more than food, for those who are hungry for love, care, support and shelter. For those who are hungry for justice and fairness. Dignity and worth.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who are hungry for peace and stability, security and safety. We pray for those who fear the enemy who walks with them, who lives among them, who tries to influence and change them.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those who have struggled and still struggle with excessive heat across Europe and America, may those with cool spaces offer a welcome and support. May those without shelter be offered a roof, a haven, a hope of comfort and safety.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for those adversely affected by ongoing and seemingly never-ending strikes to transport and health services. Those who can’t travel to places they need to get to. For those who can’t get the care they need, whose illnesses get worse, whose pain increases and who frailty becomes harder to recover from.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for our youngsters, being brought up in a digital age where good and bad, truth and falsehood, right and wrong seem hard to navigate with so much on-line influence. For those who see the world as a frightening uncertain place and wonder how they will step out and navigate it themselves.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

We pray for ourselves that we may tread the world carefully and seek what is right and good and truthful. We pray that we may be the scatterer of good deeds and words, kind thoughts and love in action. We pray that we may do our best each step of the way, that we may be the best followers of Jesus that we can be, that we may seek and find the Kingdom of God.

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers.**

And in a moment of stillness, we offer our unspoken prayers for ourselves and others…

Merciful and loving God,
**hear our prayers. Amen.**



**A prayer for all ages together**

Lord, we sometimes struggle,
but we will trust in you.
Others may succeed by taking short-cuts,
but we will trust in you.
We live with problems without easy solutions,
but we will trust in you.
We are often tired and frustrated,
but we will trust in you.
We don’t know when you are coming again,
but we will trust in you.
Lord, remind us of your love for us, and your power,
so that we can always trust you, whatever happens.
**Amen.**



**A sending out prayer**

Almighty God,
you are the creator and sustainer of all things
and we put our trust in you.
Be with us in the days ahead,
in all our joys and challenges.
Help us to remember that all things are yours
and nothing can take us out of your hands.
In Jesus’ name.
**Amen.**