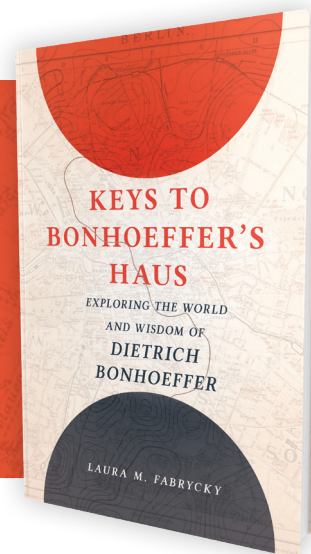


DISCUSSION GUIDE

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CHAPTER 1: VISITING THE HOUSE, HOLDING A KEY

1. What has been your personal experience with Dietrich Bonhoeffer's story? Who or what has informed it?
2. The author describes how unsettling it can be to move to a new country with a different language and culture. Share a time in your life when you've experienced an uprooting of normalcy. What systems, people, and small comforts did you lean on as you navigated those changes? What practices help you to orient when you feel foggy or lost?
3. The author describes unintentionally bumping into Bonhoeffer's story around Berlin. Have you experienced a similar chance encounter that later played a bigger role in your life? Is there a topic, person, or story now that you keep bumping into? How can you explore it further?
4. In this chapter we learn about Rev. Martin Niemöller, his famous poem, and how he changed his mind about his support for Hitler. Think back to a time when you changed your mind. What made the difference?
5. In talking about Germany's remembrance of the Holocaust, the author says, "The past is always present here in Germany and it is both personal and public." What part of your community's or nation's past begs for personal and public reckoning?
6. The author's key to the Bonhoeffer-Haus represents, for her, an offering of trust and also her responsibility to that place and its story. What keys are on your keychain, and what do they represent for you?
7. After the war, many Germans claimed ignorance and innocence for the widespread atrocities and murder; some claimed to have tried to stop them quietly. Looking back, can you think of times that you wish you had spoken up or worked against injustices more?

CHAPTER 2: LEARNING THE STORY

Key: There's a bigger story than my own.

1. The author attends a volunteer guide meeting without knowing German. Have you ever felt that you didn't fit into a group? How did you handle the situation?
2. Bonhoeffer scrawled his address in his copy of Plutarch before being put to death in a concentration camp. If you knew your life's end was imminent, what clue would you leave for your family?
3. As the author learns Bonhoeffer's story better, she finds that he becomes less familiar to her rather than more. Have you experienced that phenomenon—where learning about something or someone made it or them seem stranger to you?
4. Struggling to make sense of the meaning of a Nazi-era memorandum, the author asserts that “even language has a morality, or immorality, in whether it discloses or seals off facts and responsible thought, in whether it serves the truth or lies.” How do you respond to this claim?
5. In this chapter, we are introduced to the German philologist Victor Klemperer, who kept a meticulous diary of what happened to words and language during the Nazi era. He describes his habit of diary-keeping as a kind of “balancing bar” to hold on to during those years. What do you hold on to during times of stress or difficulty? What practices do you keep that help keep you sane and steady? How might those practices connect you to others, to your community, or even to history?
6. The author describes how “the [Nazi] party spread its ideas in the beguilingly commonplace ways that Nazi terms became everyday terms” (p. 45). What words do you think have become corroded in your lifetime? What words have been redeemed to their full understanding? Are there words that have changed meaning for you, for better or worse, during your lifetime?
7. “I had to confront some of my own gaps in knowledge about [Dietrich Bonhoeffer and that] my American mind might not be able to effortlessly understand his German one” (p. 51). How do you respond to the author's caution about making Dietrich Bonhoeffer “hers,” as if he were her imaginary friend? What distances existed between him and her?
8. What differences do you notice in the author between her first impromptu tour and the one that she describes later in the chapter? How has she grown? What has changed within her?
9. The chapter concludes with a description of how “few [Germans] wanted to talk about” what happened after the defeat of World War II and the demise of Nazi rule. How do you respond to the idea that the truth never changed, even if the stories people told about it did?

CHAPTER 3: SOURCE OF IDENTITY

Key: We are who we are because we belong to people and to places.

1. How does thinking about Dietrich Bonhoeffer in terms of the people and places he belonged to change the way you understand his life?
2. Just as Bonhoeffer was influenced by members of his family and others, who has significantly influenced you? What values or practices have they given you?
3. The author visits places that significantly shaped Bonhoeffer's life, including Tübingen, where he began his university studies, and Schwäbisch Hall, where he had deep family roots. Where do you feel strongly or meaningfully attached to? What do those places mean for you?
4. Similarly, if you are a citizen of a nation, what does your citizenship mean to you? How do you exercise it? In what ways do you cherish or neglect it? How does your citizenship matter to or for others?
5. The author introduces Bonhoeffer's father, mother, and grandmother in this chapter. Of these three personalities, who do you find most intriguing, captivating, or admirable? What drew you to them?
6. The author discusses the research of Dr. Kristen Monroe to better understand how people make moral choices in difficult, even violent circumstances. What did Monroe find made the difference between whether a person acted and took risks for someone else, or merely stood as a bystander?
7. What do you think are some of your nation's "emotionally compelling but murky, dubious myths" (p. 87-88)?

CHAPTER 4: THE WATCHWORDS

Key: When we hold on to the truth, we find the truth holds onto us, even when we are tempted to despair.

1. The author describes a home maintenance project involving her lawn, a hedge, a neighbor, and a garage. Think of a time when you had to tackle tasks in the upkeep of life with family, neighbors, or even strangers. What worked well? How did you approach the tasks? Did they come to a satisfying resolution? Are they ongoing?
2. The author mentions adopting a scripture-reading plan that she began in Berlin. Here's the chart she used to document her reading: <https://app.box.com/s/iip8fimjh9btvk6bh1t0>.
3. How do you react to Rev. Ulrike Trautwein's sobering words that many people who read the daily Moravian texts also participated in persecution of Jews?

4. The author describes the practices of prayer that Bonhoeffer instituted in the illegal seminary, and how difficult the students found it at first. What are your prayer practices, if you have any? When and how did you begin to practice them? How have you grown in them?
5. “Prayer offered [Bonhoeffer] solace and simultaneously plunged him more deeply into the needs of the world,” (p. 117) the author observes. How do you think about prayer? Do you imagine prayer as an escape from or as engagement with the world? In the paradox of truth, how can it be both?
6. The author suggests the recovery of certain words, like *acedia*, and the recovery of praying the Psalms to care better for the people and places to which we belong. What do you think about that diagnosis of our times and about her prescription of prayer? Similarly, like Bonhoeffer, have you felt the tug of *acedia* in your life? When are you most aware of it? How have you worked through it?

CHAPTER 5: CROSSING BOUNDARIES

Key: When we venture beyond home with curiosity, we are given the chance to understand ourselves, our world, and our responsibility to that world better.

1. The chapter opens with a description of the gentrification of a neighborhood. Are there neighborhoods near you that have undergone that kind of process? What do you know of the history of that neighborhood, or of some of the historical, civic, or political tensions that gentrification unearthed?
2. What do you make of Bonhoeffer’s view of American race relations?
3. The author acknowledges that it was easier for her to judge German history than to face the realities of American history. How does learning about another culture’s moments of moral failure help us face failures of our own? What moments in your country’s history need to be faced with contrition, repentance, and renewed moral imagination?
4. How does thinking about Jesus as “the black Jesus of Harlem” challenge or inspire you?
5. The author suggests that her habit of thinking of herself as not being “from here” means that she avoids paying attention to and taking responsibility for the place in which she lives. By contrast, what habits do you cultivate that help you take responsibility in the places you live, work, vacation, or travel?
6. “Coming to know Berlin through Bonhoeffer’s life helped me better see my own” (p. 147). How has that been true for you as you have journeyed in this chapter?

CHAPTER 6: BONHOEFFER BY BIKE

Key: We shouldn't just "stay in our lane" when others are suffering in theirs.

1. How do you respond to the author's depiction of bicycling in Europe, and to her suggestion that automobile travel can dull our awareness to our own human vulnerabilities and to those of other people?
2. In a scene from a tour, the author identifies herself as a Christian and then says, "What we believe and teach in our faith communities bears upon those who do not belong to them" (p. 160). How does that statement sit with you? Do you think what you believe matters to those who do not believe similarly or belong to your faith community?
3. If someone were to take a bicycle ride around the places of your life, what would they see? What might you see differently if you took a bicycle ride through your own life? How does it connect to a wider world?
4. The author feels helpless at the youth traffic school, and she sees there how she taught her daughter to "lay low" as a survival strategy. When you feel helpless, what are your common survival strategies? How would your spouse, children, or best friend answer this question about you?
5. What "lanes" do you pay attention to in life? Who travels in the other lanes?

CHAPTER 7: LIFE AS ARS MORIENDI

Key: The most masterful lives are those skilled in the art of dying well.

1. How does it change or challenge your perspective of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to think of him in terms of failure?
2. In what ways does contemplating one's own death offer clarity or wisdom?
3. Were you surprised that Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others who actively resisted the Nazis were not celebrated as heroes until years later? How does that reality influence the way you think about the risks they took and the sacrifices they made?
4. In a tour with an Italian couple, the author struggles with her own desire to offer Bonhoeffer up as a hero. How did you respond to this scene, and to her scrutiny of her intentions?
5. During a podcast interview, the author describes getting "a taste of the fearful risks of speech and action that open one up to the possibilities of grave misunderstanding." Are you tempted to avoid taking risks to avoid being misunderstood or judged? When are you most aware of those risks and that fear? Whose judgment do you fear?
6. Who do you admire that has made great sacrifices that may be unknown or not well celebrated?

CHAPTER 8: BEFRIENDING BONHOEFFER

Key: We cannot be Bonhoeffer, but we can befriend him, as modeled best by his own friend Eberhard Bethge.

1. Do you agree with the author that loneliness is a major social issue today? How have you seen loneliness grow in your life or in your community? What do you think contributes to loneliness? What do you think are sound ways to address loneliness?
2. Who are the friends that have made or make a difference in your life? In what ways are you similar to them? What are your key differences? How do they challenge or inspire you? What might they say about you if they wrote your biography?
3. How would you characterize your skills in the “friendly arts”? How could you improve them? What do you feel you do well?
4. “How we live while on pilgrimage reveals how we live in life,” (p. 238) the author writes. Have you ever been on a pilgrimage, whether to a place near or far, or on a trek that involved a great deal of effort? What did you learn about yourself and your traveling companions (whether friends or strangers) as you journeyed?
5. Where do you cultivate friendship with others? How do those places matter to your neighborhood, town, or city?

EPILOGUE: A TALE OF TWO HOUSES

1. The author describes an abandoned building on one of her regular commuting routes. Are there any places like that in your daily life—ruins that you see regularly? What do you know about that place? What does that place of ruin mean in your community?
2. The author writes: “We are not responsible for the history we inherit, but we are responsible for its memory and what we teach the next generation” (p. 249). How do you respond to that?
3. If you were to write a list of civic housekeeping tasks in your neighborhood, what would you include? Who would you involve in the tasks on the list? How might you care for the people near you? What physical tasks would the list have on it? What might you try from that list today?