



Christian Life as Holy Resistance

Using Dietrich Bonhoeffer and Martin Luther King, Jr. as examples, this meditation focuses on how Jesus calls us to use holy resistance, just as Christ did.

OVERVIEW

An exploration of what it means to live a Christian lifestyle and how little acts such as silence and prayer can be forms of resistance in our modern world.

Scripture

MATTHEW 5:10-12

Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when people revile you and persecute you and utter all kinds of evil against you falsely on my account. Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you.

MATTHEW 10:16-22,26-27

See, I am sending you out like sheep into the midst of wolves; so be wise as serpents and innocent as doves. Beware of them, for they will hand you over to councils and flog you in their synagogues; and you will be dragged before governors and kings because of me, as a testimony to them and the Gentiles. When they hand you over, do not worry about how you are to speak or what you are to say; for what you are to say will be given to you at that time; for it is not you who speak, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you. Brother will betray brother to death, and a father his child, and children will rise against parents and have them put to death; and you will be hated by all because of my name. But the one who endures to the end will be saved... So have no fear of them; for nothing is covered up that will not be uncovered, and nothing secret that will not become known. What I say to you in the dark, tell in the light; and what you hear whispered, proclaim from the housetops.

Quotations

God loves human beings. God loves the world. Not an ideal human, but human beings as they are; not an ideal world, but the real world. What we find repulsive in their opposition to God, what we shrink back from with pain and hostility... this is for God the ground of unfathomable love.

— *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

We must be ready to allow ourselves to be interrupted by God.

— *Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

Introducing the Practice

Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945) was a Lutheran pastor and theologian who was executed in a Nazi concentration camp for his resistance to the Nazi regime. During the rise of the Nazi party in Germany, many German Christian leaders adopted the dominant Nazi ideology and encouraged the German Protestant church to support the Nazi regime. Dietrich Bonhoeffer fiercely opposed these German Christians and became an outspoken leader of the Christian resistance to the Nazis. Though he had many opportunities to remain safe in the United States or England, he always chose to return to Nazi-controlled Germany in order to fight the inhumane treatment of Jews and oppose the corrupt German Christians who supported the Nazis. Bonhoeffer took seriously the demands of the Gospel, and he argued that the Germans who used the Bible to justify violence and increase their own political power were perverting the Gospel. Bonhoeffer knew that being Christian required one to stand up to corrupt worldly powers in the name of Love, Justice, and Truth, even if that resistance led to death. Bonhoeffer was arrested for his resistance in 1943, and on April 9, 1945 he was executed in the Flossenbürg concentration camp. While prominent figures such as Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Martin Luther King Jr. are famous for their Christian resistance and martyrdom, we often forget that Christians in other parts of the world are persecuted every day for their beliefs. In

fact, the worldwide persecution of Christians is currently at an all time high.

While this knowledge should remind us to be thankful for our ability to safely practice our Christian faith, we should also recognize that living a Christian life requires some resistance even in our own settings. This may sometimes take the form of active social justice, but it may also take the form of smaller actions in our daily lives. Our modern world tends to define the “good life” by measures of success, wealth, and prosperity. This is not, however, necessarily the Christian vision of the good life, which is instead defined by love, forgiveness, and service. Choosing to live a Christian life defined by love and forgiveness often requires resisting the ways of life that our society pushes us toward. In our modern world where we are constantly looking at phones and computer screens, it can be an act of resistance to put away our electronics for an hour. In our modern world where we are expected to constantly be busy, it can be an act of resistance to sit in silence for half an hour. In our modern world where divisiveness, anger, and hatred abound, an attitude of love and forgiveness can be an act of resistance. In our modern world where faith and prayer are viewed skeptically, praying and worshiping can be acts of resistance. Truly, living a Christian life in a world that teaches us that the “good life” is defined by success, wealth, and prosperity is an act of resistance.

Preparing for the Practice

Have everyone spread out to find a comfortable place to sit where they can still hear the voice of the person guiding the practice.

The Spiritual Practice

Gently close your eyes and slow your breathing as we begin this time of prayer. Settle into the present moment, knowing that silent prayer is a form of resistance, and resistance is the way of Christ. (silent pause)

Hear the words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew:

“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ But I say to you, do not resist an evildoer. But if anyone strikes you on the right cheek, turn the other also; and if anyone wants to sue you and take your coat, give your cloak as well; and if anyone forces you to go one mile, go also the second mile. Give to everyone who begs from you, and do not refuse anyone who wants to borrow from you.” (Matt. 5:38-42)

Ask yourself, what if Jesus really meant what he said? What if I stopped trying to convince myself that Jesus didn't mean these commands literally and I actually chose to follow these commands? What would that look like?

(3-5 min silence)

Hear again the words of Jesus:

"You have heard that it was said, 'You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Matt. 5:43-44)

Again ask yourself, what if Jesus really meant this? What if every time I felt angry at someone, I stopped and said a prayer for them? What if I actually loved my enemies? What would that look like?

(3-5 min silence)

Here again the words of Jesus:

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal; but store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also...No one can serve two masters; for a slave will either hate the one and love the other, or be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and wealth." (Matt. 6:19-21,24)

Ask yourself, what if I actually placed my treasure in God? What if I actually valued God more than all of my money, successes, and accomplishments? What would that look like?

(3-5 min silence)

Consider what your life would be like if you actually followed the things that Jesus taught and how different that life would be than the normal life that most people in our society live. Consider how a life of this much love, forgiveness, and selflessness would be an act of resistance in a world where everyone is busy fighting for money, status, and worldly success. Communicate any thoughts and feelings you have about this to God, asking for whatever help or guidance you feel you need.

(3-5 min silence)

The good news is that we can live this kind of life. We know it is possible. We saw Dietrich Bonhoeffer do it. We saw Martin Luther King Jr. do it. And we saw God live this life himself in Jesus of Nazareth. May we have the strength and the faith to follow in these footsteps.

Amen.

Duration: 15-20 minutes

Discussion Questions

1. In what ways is a Christian lifestyle different than a normal worldly lifestyle? In what ways are our end goals different and in what ways are our means of getting to those end goals different?
2. How do you understand these commands of Jesus? What do you think following them would look like in your own life?
3. What does resistance mean to you? What might it look like in your own life?
4. How can the examples of people like Dietrich Bonhoeffer or Martin Luther King Jr. teach us how to live and act in our own lives?