

LIVING & EFFECTIVE TRANSCRIPT – EPISODE 5 – Bonhoeffer’s Dilemma

Richard Clark: I'm going to admit something up front here: the idea of producing this episode terrifies me. Just by making the choice to explore the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, I'm risking failure. Dietrich Bonhoeffer is a complex figure. Someone who has been misunderstood and misrepresented time and again, and those misunderstandings have real implications. Maybe his most well known act is, his involvement in a failed attempt to kill Adolf Hitler, was the playing out of an ethical conundrum that resonates with anyone in times of political and social upheaval. What draws me to Dietrich is his failure. And not only did he fail, he failed in a dramatic, public way, to the point that his failure became a major part of his legacy. And we're not talking about a small mishap here; the stakes of what Bonhoeffer was trying to do were huge.

Look, I don't know about you, but I'm pretty familiar with this concept of failure. It's not something you ever get used to. For me, failure is pretty immobilising. It's not just the fact of failure, it's the fear of it, too. A lot of times my fear of being exposed, wronged, or rejected leads me to shut down, hide away, or wallow in self pity or shame, or even just coast.

What separates Bonhoeffer from so many of his peers, though, was that even though he failed, he chose to act. So how did a man so immersed in social and political chaos find meaning and purpose? How did he have the confidence to go on when he so often found himself to be wrong and misguided?

Reggie Williams: So you're not going to rely on some set of principles. You're not going to rely on even your conscience, as Bonhoeffer says in his "After Ten Years." You're not going to rely on some sense of duty, because one may end up doing one's duty for the devil - as many Nazis said, "I was just doing my job."

Richard: That's the voice of Reggie Williams, the author of *Bonhoeffer's Black Jesus: Harlem Renaissance Theology and an Ethic of Resistance*.

As a theologian, Bonhoeffer didn't study the Bible just to figure out what it meant; he studied it to figure out what it meant for him. And the answer to that question was never comfortable, and the road it led him down wasn't necessarily a victorious one.

Reggie: You end up throwing yourself at the mercy of Christ and acting. In this case acting to save your neighbor.

Richard: *The Christian Standard Bible* and *Christianity Today* present *Living & Effective*, a podcast about the moments when humanity and the Bible collide.

Richard: Dietrich Bonhoeffer was dealt a pretty good hand in life. He and his family were pretty well off. It wouldn't be a stretch to say that Bonhoeffer was blessed.

Reggie: His family was wealthy. He was born in Breslau, Germany, what is now Wrocław, Poland, in 1906. Eventually, they moved to Berlin and his father was the head of a psychiatric hospital which was connected to the University of Berlin. And [he was] probably the leading psychiatrist in the country, which made for Bonhoeffer's privileged upbringing.

Richard: Dietrich was raised in a family that gave him options; not just economic, educational, and vocational options, but religious options.

Reggie: His mother didn't work as she was Christian. Bonhoeffer's family was not. Dad wasn't Christian. They didn't go to church. Mom did Bible study with the kids at home.

Richard: Bonhoeffer could have been anything he wanted to be; but, almost from the beginning, he was drawn to a profession centered around studying and understanding the Bible, to the shock of everyone around them.

Reggie: Bonhoeffer was the only one of his siblings to do any kind of theological training or be interested in religion. That wasn't the case for the entire, for the rest of the family.

Richard: What was his family's feeling about him pursuing that?

Reggie: I mean the statement, "I'm going to be a theologian," in that context and in that time, may have been [similar], [or] sounded something like, "I'm going to be a rocket scientist." Not only is it precocious or braggadocious, it was also unusual. And he [was only] 13 years old, for a kid to say that, to make that declaration and to do it as a career at 13 years old: he's a fairly unique person.

Reggie: So it says more, maybe, about his ambition than his righteousness.

Reggie: That's right. He might not call it ambition, he may have called it pride or ego; strongly self assured.

Richard: I want to make sure we don't miss this. Bonhoeffer seemed to understand that some of our deepest flaws can also be our greatest superpowers, and vice versa. It's pretty ironic that even in his self assuredness, he questions himself. You can imagine Bonhoeffer struggling to fit in with his family, and then slowly realizing that he was different from them, that they didn't exactly respect his life goals in the same way that he did. And that ambivalent response to his ambitions, that would have impacted him, too. I can relate to this feeling of being alone in a crowd, having interests and personality quirks that others don't really relate to. Sometimes the feelings that I have as a result of those experiences are constantly swinging between pride and self doubt; a feeling of elitism and a feeling of loneliness. I would suspect that Bonhoeffer might have felt the same way. And even in the middle of all of those feelings, Dietrich was still attentive to the changes going on around him.

What was Bonhoeffer's attitude about his country. How did he view Germany?

Reggie: He and his family were patriots. They're an upper crust group. The Nazis gained a lot of traction in a populist move. They had a wide acceptance amongst most Germans, which is how they got to be a juggernaut of power. That said, Bonhoeffer's community of people, the wealthy educated class, were not so easily swayed. No one in his family supported Hitler. Probably safe to say that not many of his neighbors [did]. It's another thing to say, though: did they show resistance? Active resistance?

Richard: That question, "Did they show active resistance?" would haunt Dietrich most of his life. He spent these younger years observing more than anything, and he internalized both the successes and the mistakes that surrounded him. Bonhoeffer became restless. Bonhoeffer got to work.

Reggie: 1930 writes his habilitation trip. He's 24 years old when he completes it in 1930. He qualifies for a teaching position at the University of Berlin. He also wants to be ordained in the Lutheran Church. He's appointed as a private docent, as a professor, as lecturer at the University of Berlin, but he's too young to be ordained at 24 with PhD and a teaching position at the university right now. The man in charge of his ordination process argues that he should see the world a little bit. He's young, he's ready. He should see the world a little bit, learn English. He settled on the United States, and in particular Bonhoeffer settled on, and he was not excited about going, but he eventually settles on New York.

Richard: We think now of Bonhoeffer as a spy, a theologian who went rogue and committed themselves to a high stakes government coup that if successful would end Hitler's reign and the Nazi's hold over Germany. That part of his life appeals to me, because it gives me the feeling that we can make a direct impact on whatever political or moral crisis is happening in our world. I feel like on a daily basis I read the news and I feel the weight of mass shootings, abortion, sexual assault, and racial animosity. Those things feel so concrete, so tied to who and where I am, but I still feel powerless to do anything about them. Dietrich probably felt these tensions, too. I'm sure he felt the pull to go back to Germany and make himself more concretely useful, but he stayed focused on what he felt God called him to do.

Reggie: Rather than, say, your Harvard or your Princeton or your Yale, or any of these other major schools - it's not the school, because he doesn't feel like he has anything to learn in the United States about theology. New York, however, offers a much bigger environment to learn than the seminary. He goes to New York, to Union Seminary, and does not seek to be under the tutelage of Union Seminary or Union Seminary professors alone, but goes out on his own collecting information from Harlem as well, while he's doing his learning in New York.

Richard: He's thinking outside of the system a little bit.

Reggie: [He's] creating his own knowledge, a body of knowledge.

Richard: He made a good opportunity into a better opportunity. Dietrich wanted to learn the Bible outside of the academic space and from contexts and cultures he hadn't [been able to] before.

Reggie: He goes into Harlem and starts attending black churches, and particularly Abyssinian Baptist, and there he discovers theology that is developed under completely different circumstances than his own. There he starts learning about theology as a people who have come through oppression to embrace Christ and the Cross, [to] see the world and Christian faithfulness. It's different, [one] might say, that the connection with Christ is not in, "Risen with all power," but in the Cross. The Cross is central, with the recognition that if God was with Jesus on the Cross, then God is with us in suffering at the hands of oppressive people.

Richard: This context was a far cry from his own German context, where faith tended to be tied to opportunity and success. Still, Bonhoeffer was able to see their shared humanity.

Reggie: Something that one of his close American friends Paul Lehmann said, was that he genuinely listened. [He] had this gift of trying hard to see the world from somebody else's perspective when he was in contact with them. We might say that he had an unusual amount of empathy. The German sense of shame, experience of suffering and so forth, that was just Germany post World War One, might have caused him to be sympathetic not to conflate them with black experience. They wanted to be seen, and this is one of the things that Hitler was restoring to them: whiteness. The Aryan was that argument. In New York, Bonhoeffer encounters blackness from within a black church from a people whose blackness was not derogatory; not the blackness that white supremacy created. Blackness was celebrated alongside their faith, and God loved them. God loves us. Christ knows our experience.

So, while it was the case that a lot of Germans would go to Harlem, and a lot of white people would come to Harlem as well, for various reasons, Bonhoeffer did state before he left Germany that he wanted to see theology as it is developed in circumstances completely different than his own. He heads into New York and he is listening. He says about a course he took with Reinhold Niebuhr, [that] Niebuhr required reading from artists [and] intellectuals of the Harlem Renaissance in a course that Bonhoeffer took. He required this. He says that those readings were really helpful. He learned much from his own experiences in Harlem when he was in the classroom reading about the Renaissance from these intellectuals that he was reading with Niebuhr. But even more than that, the ability to be present with people who are different than him.

Richard: Dietrich observe those who were different than him. But more than that, he observed their interaction with the Bible. He watched the black church in action, the ways they esteem Jesus' work on the Cross and the ways their faith was bolstered by it. He saw all of this and it haunted him.

Bonhoeffer tends to be haunted by things. He let things weigh on him. I don't know about you, but I struggle to rid myself of the weightier parts of life. Sometimes I see myself in them, I see my own part in the brokenness of the world, and that weightiness turns to shame. The catch, of course, is that I can get to easily bogged down in that shame. And then I'm stuck. I'm not really accomplishing anything. When I look at Bonhoeffer, I marvel at his ability to feel the true weight of the world's brokenness, to articulate it in writing, and even to see himself as part of the reason it exists. He internalized each one of those things. But even more amazingly, almost miraculously, he internalized the forgiveness of Jesus, too. He saw his all of his checkered past as a reason to move forward with even more confidence. He was open to being sanctified. Unlike a lot of us, Bonhoeffer seemed to welcome that sanctification, even if it meant it would be a long and inconsistent process.

Reggie: It would be silly to think that a school year in New York totally undoes him. It impacted him and haunted him. It caused some developments for him. He didn't come from New York having figured out what it meant for him to be a white European man. That haunted him for the rest of his life. He was a self against himself. I would say that it haunted him to the point where he's able to see things. I'm hearing [Bonhoeffer say instead of], "I see dead people," I'm hearing him say, "I see white people." He's able to see some things that he didn't see.

Richard: So he leaves New York and he goes back to Germany. What is the thing that's most striking to him in that moment?

Reggie: That racism is a Christian problem. That racism is something that Christians must confront. Racism distorts our ability to be disciples of Christ. It's in daily contact with others that we encounter Christ. Race becomes one of those barriers to our ability to be there for our neighbor. White supremacy, racism: these are obstacles that prohibit Christian discipleship.

Richard: For Dietrich, sanctification meant coming to terms with his own misguided ideas, and slowly but surely acknowledging his own moral failures.

Reggie: Prior to New York, he's making some problematic statements in a lecture in Barcelona, Spain, as he's an assistant pastor to a church of expatriate Germans in Barcelona, Spain, before going to New York. He makes some crazy statements in a couple of lectures there. One in particular, *Basic Questions of a Christian Ethic*, where he's advocating war. Ethnic pride and, you know, loyalty to my folk.

Richard: What Bonhoeffer is talking about here is not simply like an Irish parade or pride in one's ancestry. It goes beyond that to the idea that your ethnicity is better than everyone else's; the idea that what sets you apart is not just the culture you grew up in, but the color of your skin or the genes that you come from.

Reggie: In that catechism the year he comes back from New York, he calls ethnic pride a sin against the Holy Spirit. "God has from one blood made all nations that dwell upon the face of the earth," and he says that Christians should pray for nothing more than peace. No talk about war. He also says [that] even though the Christian may want to stay out of public engagement, may not feel comfortable with public engagement, there may come a time when the Christian must engage politics for the sake of loving your neighbor.

Richard: It is true that Bonhoeffer is coming to terms with the failures of himself and his people, but he's also starting to lean heavily into the next logical question. What do we do now? Well, that question would eventually be forced on Bonhoeffer as the government became more treacherous.

Reggie: It is overstepping its boundaries, now into the area of the church. It is an unfit government. It is creating too little law. Removing protections that it should have in place for its own citizens. What is a Christian to do in this case?

Richard: He understood just how tempting passivity can be, so in the church in the Jewish question, he spelled out a plan: three suggestions for how the church should respond to the Nazi threat.

Reggie: One: make known the government's injustice. Speak out.

Richard: Do you have knowledge of injustice? This is your responsibility: speak against evil doers; speak clarifying words to the church; pray against the injustice.

Reggie: Two: the Church should bind up the wounds of the victims, even if they don't belong to the Christian Church.

Richard: Do you have access to those who are hurt by injustice? This is your responsibility: take in the hurting; speak words of comfort with the afflicted; show solidarity with the suffering.

Reggie: Third one was the Church should not just continue to bind up those wounds, but the Church should throw itself into the spokes of the wheel. By this he means direct political engagement of an unfit government. Cease the wheel.

Richard: There's an element of sacrifice there.

I love this imagery in particular. Do you have access to that unstoppable moving force? Dietrich presents us with an image of a selfless, almost foolish, act being committed by a corporate body with no interest in its own survival. Think about that. It makes sense. The Church of Jesus Christ is the only institution that I know of that's guaranteed to exist forever, no matter what. There is no risk that the church will die out. We have all the leverage. Jesus said in Matthew 16:18, "On this rock I will build My Church, and the Gates of Hades will not overpower it."

Of course, individual death or pain are serious matters, but Jesus Christ showed us how central sacrifice is to the Christian life. Well, Bonhoeffer took that last one to heart, but he didn't take it lightly.

Reggie: Rather than to see it as an assassination attempt, it's best to recognize this as a coup, an attempt to replace the government. It's not just one person. Of course you have to get him [Hitler] out of the way, but they had a whole government in place to replace him with. He says this in *Ethics*, that anyone who acts responsibly becomes guilty. What does that mean given his context? Well, let's think about this for a moment. You have knowledge that your government is actively murdering huge demographics of people. You know that. What do you do with that knowledge? Not to act is to act, and you are complicit. To act is to be guilty; in either direction you move is to become guilty. What does one do? What does the responsible person do?

Richard: In this case what Bonhoeffer ultimately did was participate in a government coup. It didn't work. He was arrested. Bonhoeffer failed.

Reggie: He spends quite a bit of time at Tegel Prison. It's only because he was in the military prison at Tegel that we have any correspondence from him. After the July 20 plot, 1944, failed, he's taken by the Gestapo. You don't have any correspondence from him after that.

Richard: If I'm Dietrich in that moment, I'm feeling regret at making the choice and shame at failing. I'm sitting in my jail cell thinking about the different paths I could have taken, how much more I could have done with my life. After all, I'm a man of influence. I have all this knowledge and wisdom to share. What's the point of wasting my life on this weird government coup? And then I think about the series of decisions that led me to this point.

Reggie: I would think of the defining moment of his life as Finkenwalde, the pastor's seminary. He develops that seminary, pouring himself into it, as a means of training people for service to Christ. And in the context of a Germany in which Christians had by and large gone with the devil, he's seeking a way of training Christians for ministry that would undo this dilemma that they're in, and point away after the crisis to what real Christianity looks like. He's helping Christians wanting to help the Church, not only to survive, but to diagnose and to undo these problems that they find themselves in. It's because of that effort that we have *The Cost of Discipleship* and *Life Together*, which are from that moment when he's seeking to make a way for Christians to understand what it means to live a faithful Christian life. It was written in the context of Nazi Christianity in Germany. [He's] training pastors for ministry when most Christians could not make sense of head nor tail. He's working to help them do that. And he pours himself into it.

Richard: And taking on some risk, too, I think.

Reggie: It became illegal. It became illegal and the Gestapo shut it down in 1937, but he continued to mentor them. That was the work of his life. He came back from New York, a second time, because of those students. So he goes over to New York for a short time in 1930. So he's there in 1930/31 for a full school year. He goes back in 1939 and I believe that he is there for about six weeks. Reinhold Niebuhr and Paul Lehmann secure a job for him at Union Seminary. He could stay. He could survive. He would have been safe.

Richard: It's like a no brainer on a personal level.

Reggie: Yeah, they got a nice seminary teaching position for him. He could teach there as long as he wanted, but he ultimately comes to the conclusion that if he's going to be a part of the theological and ecclesial Rebuild of Germany, he's got to be there during the struggle. He can't stay. He takes the last boat back in an act of bravery, going back. And some have said that he probably thought that he would be arrested because at the time he was pacifist and a pacifist was an enemy of the state [for] not willing to take up arms for your folk. He's pacifist. He probably thought he was going to be arrested when he landed there, when the boat landed in Germany. But he did that because, in large part, he was still mentoring those students from Finkenwalde, illegally still training, still working to be a part of the Rebuild of Church and Christianity after Naziism.

Richard: Dietrich had already made one choice between faithfulness and Naziism, but he'd have to make another one. His next choice was whether to flee or whether to act. He had to decide whether he would preserve his own safety or actively resist. I want us to note the relentless nature of these dilemmas of his. Does he stay in the US or does he go back home? Does he continue to teach at seminary at the risk of imprisonment or not? Does he participate in the coup or not? The questions kept coming, each one as unique and unprecedented as the next. Each decision was uniquely tailored to himself; each one an apparent test of Bonhoeffer's love for his neighbor.

I think we all face decision fatigue, to the point where we, a lot of times, try to offload our own decisions on to other people. We seek out self help books, our pastors, our friends, our spouses, and even historical figures like Bonhoeffer to tell us what to do.

John Hendrix: You get into a bit of presentism when you start trying to find or really pin him down in today's world, because there's just no way to do it. So the only way that you can honor him is try to read him and understand who he was in his time, in his place, and let his choices flow from his time only. But of course, we all want to do this, whether it's George Washington or John Brown, we try to bring them into the present to understand what they mean for us right now.

Richard: John Hendrix, an author and illustrator, just released *The Faithful Spy: an Illustrated Account of Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Plot to Kill Hitler*. Hendrix was careful to ground the story

in Nazi Germany. For Hendrix that fateful and ultimately failed act of Bonhoeffer's was not his defining legacy.

John: Bonhoeffer's real legacy, right now, is not the fighting of the Third Reich, even though of course there are some echoes. It's really his message to the Church. You know, he was so enraged that the German Church capitulated to Hitler's desires, his political desires which became ethical desires, which violated Christian ethics almost instantly. He was incensed that this was just accepted. And so I think the lesson today really is a word of warning to the American Church, or to any state church, that feels like some political party, whether conservative or liberal, represents the faith in some bigger way. [It] is always a danger, I think, to the Church.

Richard: There's just no getting around it. These principles do apply to us today. But what strikes me is how, in spite of being so self assured, Bonhoeffer rarely comes across as self righteous. So much political discourse has a tenor of outrage and self righteousness, but Bonhoeffer's fear and trembling approach strikes me as more than quaint.

John: God calls us, it seems, to obedience. Despite a lot of errors he made in his life, or choices that he realized were not made correctly [or] in the right spirit, he did finally obey. But that obedience did not lead to success. And I think that's the thing that, as Americans specifically, we want to tie our faith to succeeding, basically, or joy, or being like, "we make a good choice and therefore we're rewarded with happiness," and feeling like we're fulfilled. And basically Dietrich obeyed and lost. You know, he lost his life. He didn't win the war. The plot against Hitler failed. I mean, in his experience everything he did turned out wrong. That's a pretty tough lesson.

Richard: Bonhoeffer made a series of jaw droppingly brave decisions. He had every right to tout his own righteousness, yet he didn't. And I think the reason for that is he had a category for failure. Even if he convinced himself to do the right thing, he knew he could still fail at that thing.

I asked all of my guests for this episode if Dietrich had a favorite portion or part of the Bible, and they kept saying he liked the Psalms.

John: He said in *Life Together*, and I always think about this, he's like, "You are praying the Psalter, but it's not your Psalms, these are Jesus's Psalms because He prayed these, too; and if there's one that you don't feel like you can claim, like it's too bold or it's too strong, or it's too confident or maybe even it's too weak, you can rest in the fact that Jesus read these and you can claim them, like, in Jesus's voice.

Richard: Bonhoeffer was a theologian. His whole life was committed to figuring out how to understand and apply the whole book of Scripture; but in connecting the Psalms with Jesus, he connects the whole of what it means to be a Christian, to be trapped in the tension between the broken and the divine. The Psalms are filled with angst, worry, praise, fear, alarm, even anger.

Many of them are reactions to apparent failures and defeat. Jesus prayed them, and I can, too.

I probably should, since there's no question my life will continue to be characterized by a lot of failures with little successes in between. Maybe trying is its own form of success; its own victory. And honestly, this is what strikes me most about Bonhoeffer's story: just by making an attempt, I can leave behind a picture of someone who sought out the truth and attempted to live it out.

Laura M. Fabrice: Actually, the double-edgedness of Scripture shows up in some of his diary keeping at that point. It seems as though he's like a Jonah figure. He's, like, the only place he can find comfort is in Scripture. It's the only break where he gets to break from his anxiety, but it's also the place where he is driven back under the waters, like, I have to go back home. This is not where I'm supposed to be. The Scripture both torments and soothes him.

Richard: Laura M. Fabrycky is a volunteer guide of Bonhoeffer House and is currently writing a book about the experience for Fortress Press.

Laura: It's the house of Dietrich's parents, Dr. Carl and Paula Bonhoeffer. They built it as his father's retirement, and so Dietrich did not grow up there, but he was arrested in that house and it was really his Berlin residence during his adulthood. I think I came hoping that Dietrich was going to solve my problems, and that he would kind of show me what I needed to do or what we needed to do. As I learned about his narrative, learned to tell his story when I became a volunteer, I realized that he did not offer me any neat solutions. I went to Bonhoeffer looking to, like, climb onto him like a life raft and he, I felt like he kept shoving me off into the waters of my own life. Like, I was not going to find anything that was going to get solved in his narrative.

Richard: Bonhoeffer doesn't want us on his life raft, because he never had his own. He found meaning and purpose, not in some revered historical figure, but from the Words of Scripture and his intimate relationship with it. Sure, these were universal principles, they applied to everyone, but they hit Dietrich in highly personalized ways. Dietrich was earnest. He read the words of the Bible and took them to heart, and this set him on a path in life that would feel more and more lonely over time.

Laura: I think constitutionally, like, literally his, like, emotional wiring, he was a really gifted person. I think he was prone to the typical isolating features of being gifted. He could be proud, he could be arrogant, and those are very isolating kinds of, we describe them as private since but they're isolating sins. He decided to study theology at an early age in a family that, like, didn't necessarily think that was awesome and value that. His friend Eberhard would say that he studied theology because he was kind of an isolated figure, and then studying theology made him more isolated. And I think that that's probably true. I can attest to the fact [as] I've studied theology. I think people that study theology tend to have beefs with God [laughs], that they're trying to work out. Like, you're trying to get questions asked and answered and they're pretty existential ones. I think, obviously, as his life progressed and he realized, kind of, what he needed to do to be faithful to God. That was an isolating decision, certainly, because he knew

that he was in some ways entering into sin by joining the conspiracy. And he had to take on a persona that definitely kind of cut him off from people that he had been in contact with when he was working openly in the confessing church. So his life grew ever more isolated, but at so many of the stages of his life he really had to let go of a lot of things that we would have considered just absolutely normative for a man of his stature and formation and intellect.

Richard: Dietrich was destined for greatness. That makes sense. It's what a lot of lonely people are destined to. I can think of a bunch of lonely people who did great things in their lifetimes. The catch, of course, is that Dietrich didn't exactly. The underground seminary he ran was eventually snuffed out for good. His would be masterwork on ethics was never finished, and the foiled plot against Hitler led only to the arrest and deaths of thousands of resisters, Bonhoeffer included.

Laura: His faithfulness, even in these, from a world's perspective, these failed efforts, these non starts; his faithfulness in those really still mattered, even if they weren't successful in the end.

He did not build a lasting institution. There is no Alumni Association. And even his martyrdom, in some ways, I think it's funny to call it a martyrdom because really it was a failed coup attempt that got him executed. It was a failure. Like, really, it was. But the failure mattered. It offers, at least in German history and certainly in the history of the world, it offers a different witness; but it's not a witness of heroism. It's a witness of failure. Faithfulness and failure.

Richard: What, in all of his studies and all of the verses of the Bible, could have instilled in him such a commitment to living a faithful life open to failure? For Dietrich, Jesus colored the whole.

Laura: That Jesus, in so many ways, was not successful; but He for sure was victorious. What we see in Dietrich is someone who has really understood what it means to imitate Jesus, and that means handing one's life over and embracing one's cross and dying to the self. The crucified one is the one whom God loves. And that's what the Christian life is, and if we aren't being taught that then we are not being taught the Christian life.

Richard: Failure doesn't have to feel ugly. In a way, it can be freeing, and maybe it was for Bonhoeffer.

Laura: Eventually, even though when he was finally quite isolated near the end, he really did enjoy a peace that's recorded, you know, in his final days, a peace that's recorded by some of his people that gave witness to what those days were like, that he felt accompanied by God. Like, he was at peace. And so, in some ways, as his life grew more and more isolated, his peace actually increased. Like, he didn't seem cut off even though he was in fact becoming more and more cut off.

Richard: It's easy to give lip service to the humanity of someone like Bonhoeffer, but it's another thing altogether to come in contact with the evidence of his humanity. That makes visiting the Bonhoeffer house a particularly striking experience.

Laura: Americans, like, different nationalities, are more affected than others when they walk into his room. And Americans are one of them. Like, they get really flin, like they're like, "Oh God, here we are!" You know, like in the space? And I'm totally like that every time I walk in. I'm like, "Oh, here it is again!" [laughs] But Germans, when they walk in, are much more matter of fact, like, "Okay, noted. There it is, alright. On we go." A visitor recently, who really it was like he had a moment there, like, he was like, "I've... when I go back to the US, I need to make some changes. Like I need to... I need to live differently. I need to take some different risks than I was expecting." And you could hear it in his voice, like, we didn't get what he was going to have to face. Like, he felt so moved by Dietrich's story and felt like God was telling him he needed to make changes. And, you know, we're safe here in Berlin, but when he goes back to America he's going to have to make some changes. And you could feel, in some ways, that kind of a small death that he was kind of staring at, going like, "I don't have to do this, I just feel like I should." And those moments tend to happen there rather than down in the conference room.

Richard: Hendrix was actually telling me about a moment he had like this, where he was visiting the Bonhoeffer study in preparation for his work on *The Faithful Spy*.

John: I'm in the spot where he was when he was writing this. It's hard to not be affected by it; to kind of think, you know, "I'm not sure what I would have done. I really don't think I would have been as courageous as he was."

Richard: It's a pretty human impulse to want to compare yourself to Dietrich, just like it's a human impulse to compare our current modern context to Nazi Germany.

Laura: People who would say, like, "We should assassinate someone!" I think that so overlooks... First of all, one: how long and bad things had been. Not just, like, "Our guy's not in power," but there had been careful planning, meticulous chronicling of atrocities, increased senses of derangement. Germans were literally losing a war. People were being conscripted and sent off to their doom. I think a lot of people had gotten to that place. And at that point the whole Nazi experiment was just, [well] it wasn't an experiment it was just this like massive social failure [and] moral ruin; it was so aberrant, it flew in the face of so many norms, it needed to end. Like, it was eating itself alive. Like, it was eating Germany alive. So I don't think we're there yet.

Richard: I didn't get a chance to visit the house myself, but I found myself having a pretty similar experience after interviewing my guests for this episode. I'm honestly a little embarrassed to say this, but I felt my pulse quicken and then I started to have like this spiral of thoughts about Dietrich and I [laughs]. We're not the same. Not even a little bit. And neither are the contexts in which we live.

But then again, aren't we kind of the same? Is that prideful to say, that I'm like Bonhoeffer? Am I too self assured? Or is it pride? Am I even worthy of feeling pride? I guess sometimes I risk failure, just like Bonhoeffer, but writing something or having a hard conversation with a friend or making a podcast isn't the same as attempting a coup.

There's worse things in life than making an episode of a podcast that everybody thinks is bad, and there are more humiliating failures than rejection. Bonhoeffer was killed. The worst that'll happen to me is critical feedback, or disapproving looks from people who don't like me all that much.

Even if I do succeed in my work: will it matter? Will people benefit from my existence, or will people just see the mistakes I make? Will God be pleased with me?

Laura: There's this, like, small cigarette burn on this, there's a sort of a velvet blotter that is on the desk, and there's a small cigarette burn on it. And I love pointing that out, in part, because it makes him so human. First of all, he was a smoker. That's rarely emphasized, certainly among American Evangelicals [laughs]. And apparently the room can be blue with smoke. That's how heavily he smoked. But that he burned the blotter and that's still there, that little burn mark is still there; it speaks to a humanness that I think the hero narrative denies him.

Richard: The cigarette burn feels like such a brilliant, small scale metaphor for the failure of what he tried to do [laughs]. This hole is there for the end of time, and it shows people that he tried something risky and then screwed up in the midst of it. And it just sits there for everyone to see [while] walking through his house. That's beautiful [laughs].

Laura: It is.

Richard: But I'm not Dietrich Bonhoeffer Neither are you. But I do know that the same Bible that haunted him haunts us, too.

This has been the final episode of Season One of *Living & Effective*. Thank you so much for listening. Thank you so much for all the feedback. This has been great, very rewarding, and I hope to see you again sometime soon. Stay tuned to the feed, don't unsubscribe. You might get some news soon about something in the future. Make sure to rate and review us on iTunes to help us spread the word.

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