

A Disciple Named Dietrich

By Beth Beall

Dietrich Bonhoeffer was a German pastor who was killed during World War II. Learn about his life, and listen to a piece of music that may have encouraged him when he was in prison.

For

Just for Kids

Season

Spring



 by [dierk schaefer](#)

Needed

An internet connected audio device so that you can listen to a song on YouTube

Activity Plan

1. God is with us in everything we do, and prayer helps us to remember that. Begin this activity by praying this prayer:

"Thank you, God, for people who stand up for what is right even when it is scary or difficult. Give me the courage to do whatever you want me to do. Amen."

2. Read the story below about a man named Dietrich. For him, following Jesus meant making some very unpopular choices.

The Courage to Follow Jesus

Tell me, what would you have done? What would you have done if your government said that certain people had no rights? What would you have done if some of the people in your church agreed with the government? Some of my friends told me to keep quiet. They said that I could not make a difference. But for me, it wasn't about whether I could make a difference. It was about doing what God wanted me to do. And I believed that God wanted me to speak out. And not only to speak out, but to act. Let me back up a little, and begin by introducing myself...

My name is Dietrich Bonhoeffer. I was born on February 4, 1906, in Germany. My twin sister and I had four other siblings. Our family loved music. We were not, however, a family that focused on God. So you can imagine my family's surprise when I told them, at age 14, that I wanted to become a pastor! I began to study the Bible, and after I graduated from college, I traveled to Spain and the United States and continued to study the Bible and learn about being a pastor in those places.

I returned to Germany and became a pastor in 1931. Those were difficult days in Germany, because many people were out of work. A man named Adolf Hitler promised to make life much better if the people would elect him as their new leader, and that's exactly what people did in 1933. From the very beginning, I opposed Hitler. He persecuted many different groups of people, most notably Jewish people. Even some people in churches supported this persecution. I spoke out on radio stations, in writing, in churches, and in person, saying that Jesus did *not* want us to persecute anyone. Slowly, some other individuals and churches began to speak out against Hitler, too. But it was scary. To speak out against Hitler meant that a person might end up in prison. Yet, I believed then—and I say to you now—that if we are following Jesus, it might indeed sometimes be scary. We are holding up our light against a world that can be so very dark. But Jesus will never, ever abandon us.

There came a time when I became afraid that I would either have to pledge my allegiance to Hitler (as many people had to do), or else be arrested. And so I left Germany in 1939 and went to the United States. Over the next two years, I prayed and taught and learned many things. Finally I knew that I needed to go home to Germany. I knew in my heart that God wanted me to keep doing good work there. When I returned to Germany, life became very restrictive for me. I was not allowed to write any articles or to do any public speaking. I prayed about what work God wanted me to do, and soon I found myself working for an organization called Abwehr. Some other Abwehr workers and I began helping Jewish people escape to Switzerland from Germany. I believed very much that God is always on the side of freedom.

One day, I was arrested for my work in helping Jews escape to Switzerland. I spent the next year and a half at a military prison. While in prison, I continued to write about following Jesus. Some of the guards helped me by smuggling my writings out of the prison. The guards gave my writings to people who shared them with others. After 18 months in prison, I was transferred to a concentration camp. The concentration camps were the places where Hitler kept Jewish people and the many other people he persecuted. On April 8, 1945, I was sentenced to die by hanging the next day. Was I scared when I heard that I was to die? Yes, of course. But I also knew that Jesus was with me, and that the power of God was greater than the power of Hitler. As I prepared to die, I asked one of my fellow prisoners to share this message with a friend of mine: "This is the end, but for me the beginning, of life."

Thank you for listening to my story. I hope you will keep following Jesus, even if it makes you unpopular, even if it requires great courage.

3. Dietrich Bonhoeffer grew up in a home where music was very important. It is likely that music fed his soul and gave him courage over the years. At one point in his life, Dietrich Bonhoeffer said, **"Music will help dissolve your perplexities...and in time of care and sorrow, it will keep a fountain of joy alive in you."**

Perhaps when he was in prison he would close his eyes and hum or sing the beautiful song below. It is a hymn entitled, "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring," and it was written by a German composer named Johann Sebastian Bach in the early 1700's. As you listen to the song, give thanks for the life of Dietrich Bonhoeffer, and ask God to give you courage to do whatever God calls you to do.

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kldahkWDkv4>

