

“Nothing can fill the gap when we are away from those we love, and it would be wrong to try and find anything. We must simply hold out and win through. That sounds very hard at first, but at the same time it is a great consolation, since leaving the gap unfilled preserves the bond between us. It is nonsense to say that God fills the gap: he does not fill it, but keeps it empty so that our communion with another may be kept alive, even at the cost of pain.

In the second place, the dearer and richer our memories, the more difficult the separation. But gratitude converts the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy. The beauties of the past are not endured as a thorn in the flesh, but as a gift precious for its own sake. We must not wallow in our memories for surrender to them, just as we don't gaze all the time at a valuable present, but get it out from time to time, and for the rest hide it away as a treasure we know is there all the time. Treated in this way, the past can give us lasting joy and inspiration.

Thirdly, times of separation are not a total loss, nor are they completely unprofitable for our companionship - at least there is no reason why they should be. In spite of all the difficulties they bring, they can be wonderful means of strengthening and deepening fellowship.”

Theologian Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison*, pp. 120 – 121 <sup>1</sup>

Storytelling in small groups or personal reflection. One by one, each person shares their answer to the first prompt below. Then go to the next question and so forth. A person can pass.

- 1) Share about a time you were away from someone you loved. How did it feel at the time? Looking back, what did you learn from that experience?**
- 2) Tell about an experience where “gratitude coverts the pangs of memory into a tranquil joy.”**
- 3) Share about a time of separation from someone you loved and how it may have been a “wonderful means of strengthening and deepening fellowship?”**

Check out and download more small group storytelling reflections and prompts at:

<https://lifesjourney.us/storytelling-in-small-groups-menu/>

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<sup>1</sup> Ted Bowman, *Finding Hope When Dreams Have Shattered*, (Self-published, 2001,2018), pp. 74-75.