If you have your Bibles, open with me to Hebrews 3:12-14. We are continuing in our series “Core” by considering “Authenticity.” Last week, Pastor David preached on authenticity in our personal holiness, and this morning I want to talk to you about living with authenticity in our relationships with one another as a core value of who we are here at Coastal. To be authentic means to be “genuine” or “real.” I think that authenticity also carries with it the idea of “transparency.” While everyone loves authenticity in theory, it’s often much harder to practice than to preach. I bet if I did a poll of everyone in this room, a lot of you probably said “fine” or “good” when someone asked how you were when you walked in this morning when you really aren’t fine or good. I remember this guy I used to work with back when I worked at the hospital who I always thought was really weird. Why did I think he was weird? Because he always honestly answered the question, “how are you?” I’d pass him in the hallway, and I’d say, “how’s it going man?” and he’d go into detail about how his breakfast was, his feelings about his dog’s death, the struggles he has in his relationship with his dad, and how he didn’t feel like being at work today. After a while, I just stuck with “good morning.”

I think that my generation (millennials) have a tendency to be passionate about authenticity. Younger people can spot a fake a mile away and despise it, and that’s admirable. But my concern is that authenticity for authenticity’s sake is pointless. There are a lot of young people in the church today that crave transparency, and that’s a good thing, but my concern is that this transparency doesn’t actually lead anywhere. It’s a desire for transparency divorced from a desire for holiness. Take a stereotypical college guys small group for an example. One guy will say, “well guys, I messed up and looked at porn this week.” The next guy will go, “yep, me too.” Finally they’ll all pat themselves on the back for being “authentic,” go right back to their sin, and meet again the next week to commiserate. In an excellent article on this phenomenon, Brett McCracken wrote, “It’s almost as if our sins have become a currency of solidarity-something we pat each other on the back about as fellow authentic, broken people. But sin should always be grieved rather than celebrated.” This isn’t real authenticity: it’s wallowing in brokenness because misery loves company. But as we will see this morning, real authenticity is intentional about pursuing holiness.

So the question I’d like to answer this morning with you all is this: What does biblical authenticity look like? Since our mission statement at Coastal is to develop authentic followers of Jesus Christ, what does biblical authenticity look like? As I considered this topic, Hebrews 3:12-14 stuck out to me as a text that powerfully displays biblical authenticity. So as we jump in, I wanted to give you my definition of biblical authenticity, and we’ll spend this morning unpacking this: “Biblical authenticity is a Christ-honoring transparency about our struggles, temptations, and sins in the local church for the purpose of pursuing holiness and persevering in the faith together.” This morning I want to show the depth of our need for this authenticity, the
purposes for it, and what it looks like in our lives together. With this in mind, let’s read Hebrews 3:12-14 together:

“Take care, brothers, lest there be in any of you an evil, unbelieving heart, leading you to fall away from the living God. 13 But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called “today,” that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.”

Pray

The first thing I want to consider this morning is **the need for authenticity**. An authentic lifestyle within the church isn’t just a good idea; it’s necessary for both our health as individual Christians and for the health of our church as a whole. A healthy church is an authentic church. And there are three areas here that show us our need for authenticity. First, we need authenticity because our faith is **corporate**. Christianity is by nature a corporate faith. We live in a culture that is radically individualized. We idolize self-made people who “made it” on their own without help from anyone else. But this is not the way that God intends for His church to live. When you turn from your sins and trust in Jesus, you are not only united with Christ; you are united with His body. You are an adopted son/daughter of God the Father, but you have brothers and sisters. We see this reality right here in this text. The author of Hebrews begins verse 12 by saying, “take care, brothers.” In verse 1 of this chapter he refers to the believers as “holy brothers.” In Christ, we have been set apart from the world and adopted into the family of God. That’s why the idea of a Christian without active engagement in the local church is foreign to New Testament Christianity.

Just recently I was listening to a talk show with a very well-known political commentator (I won’t name names because you probably know them) being interviewed about their faith. This person made the all-too-typical comment, “I’m a Christian, but I don’t go to church. I feel more connected to God in nature.” I wish I had a dollar for every time I heard that line. The silly thing about it is we would never use that kind of logic in any other area of our lives. What if tomorrow morning at 8am I called the church and said, “Pastor David, I work here, but I’m not going to come in to work. I feel more connected to Coastal when I sleep in.” But here’s the real issue with that kind of thinking. Being active in a local church isn’t about feeling connected to God. I hope that happens for all of us, but **feelings** are not the ultimate standard of reality. A girl in my small group once told me that she doesn’t read her Bible or pray because she doesn’t feel like it, and doing something she didn’t feel like would be inauthentic. I think her problem is a bad definition of authenticity. Authenticity is not living in line with my feelings; it’s living in line with my identity. If I am united to Christ, an adopted son of God, filled with the Spirit, called out of darkness into the marvelous light of God’s kingdom, then I can serve God regardless of my feelings. To be authentic is to live out of my identity in Christ rather than living out of my feelings. And one way that I live out my identity in Christ is by living in relationship with Christ’s body. Later in this letter, the author of Hebrews said, “And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, **not neglecting to meet together**, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24-
That’s why it’s so important that we are faithfully here on Sunday mornings and in small groups; so that we can stir one another up to love and good works and encourage each other in the faith. Now, don’t misunderstand me—Going to church doesn’t make you a Christian any more than walking into a stadium with jerseys makes you a football team (just ask the Redskins). But here this carefully this morning: Your active participation in a local church is a thermometer on your spiritual life. Being active in a local church does not make you a Christian, but it is evidence that you truly are a Christian. So we need authenticity with one another because of the corporate nature of our faith.

The second reason we need authenticity is that we are prone to wander. Come Thou Font of Every Blessing is one of my all-time favorite hymns. Some of you might recognize this point as a line from the third verse: “Prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love. Here’s my heart, Lord take and seal it, seal it for thy courts above.” Left to our own strength, all of us would wander away from God. None of us are strong enough to keep ourselves from falling away. Jeremiah 17:9 says, “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?” Our hearts can deceive us, and before we know it we can drift away from God. And apart from His grace, we will. As the other song says, “I could never keep my hold through life’s fearful path. For my love is often cold; he must hold me fast.” We daily need God’s grace to renew us and change us and keep us from wandering. But one of the means that God uses to do this is the fellowship of believers in the local church. God uses authentic relationships within the body to encourage us when we’re in despair, to challenge us when we’re comfortable in sin, and fix our eyes on Jesus as we run this race together.

BTW: When I say things like “wander” and “fall away,” I’m not talking about a genuine believer losing their salvation. I’m convinced, along with the rest of the teaching team at Coastal, that a genuine believer is eternally secure in Christ. We don’t have time to get into that huge and important discussion now, but I would refer you to an excellent sermon that Pastor Shaun preached on Hebrews 6 if you’re interested in diving into that question more. But here’s the point for this morning: God has promised to cause all of His children to persevere in the faith, and one of the means He uses to accomplish that is authentic Christian community.

The third reason why we need authenticity is that sin is deceitful. Verse 13 says that the reason we need to daily encourage each other is “that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” Sin is deceptive. It’s tricky. 2nd Corinthians says that Satan disguises himself as an angel of light, so it’s not a surprise that the sin in our lives would come disguised as well. But here’s the thing about sin: It never keeps its promises. Sin always promises pleasure, success, fulfillment, or whatever else, and it never delivers. Sin is like bait on a hook, and you and I are fish naively thinking we found an easy dinner. By the time we bite the bait, we’re already hooked and being dragged toward death. But before we bite, sin often looks harmless, but that’s because we can’t see the hook. When you’re tempted to look at pornography, you are just seeing the bait of temporary, fleshly indulgence. You don’t think about the fact that it will erode your brain, destroy your marriage and family, help fund sex trafficking, dehumanize people made in the image of God, and send you to hell if you don’t
repent of it. You just see the bait. When you’re tempted to have too much to drink, you just think it will be a good time. You don’t think about the effects of alcoholism on your family, the number of people killed by drunk drivers, the foolishness that will come out of your mouth, etc. You just see the bait. When you’re tempted to gossip about someone, you might think it’s just a harmless conversation. You don’t think about the fact that you’re verbally tearing apart a person made in God’s image for whom Jesus died, that you will ruin your own reputation by presenting yourself as a gossip, and the relational brokenness that will inevitably follow from you trashing someone else. You just see the bait.

Sin is deceitful. It is destructive. Unchecked and unrepented of, sin will lead to all kinds of brokenness and chaos in this life and eternal punishment in the next. That’s why we need authentic Christian community. The author of Hebrews talks about the deceitfulness of sin and the horror of falling away from the living God, and what is his solution? Christians in the body of Christ daily encouraging, exhorting, and warning one another about the deceitfulness of sin and pointing each other to the superior glory of Jesus Christ. We need each other because we all have blind spots. You can see bait in my life that looks harmless to me, and vice versa. We need brothers and sisters in our lives that we can be transparent with so that we can warn each other about the deceitfulness of sin and encourage one another to pursue to Christ.

The second point I’d like to make this morning is about the purpose of authenticity. We saw that we need authenticity in our church because of the corporate nature of our faith, our tendency to wander, and the deceitfulness of sin. But I believe there are two distinct purposes for authentic community that we see in Scripture; holiness and perseverance. These purposes of authenticity are what set biblical authenticity apart from the fake authenticity that we talked about in the intro. We want to be authentic because we want to look like Jesus and persevere in the faith. So let’s consider these two purposes together.

First, we need authentic community in our striving for holiness. What does it mean to strive for holiness? To be holy is to be “set apart.” It means being set apart from sin and set apart to God. It is both fleeing sin and pursuing Christ. The big theological word for this is sanctification. Sanctification is the process of fleeing sin and pursuing Christ once you have been saved. It will never be complete in this life, but every true believer is on this journey of sanctification. Sanctification is not what saves us, but it is the evidence that we really have been saved. Sanctification is different from justification. Justification is a once and for all event that takes place when we believe in the gospel. In justification, God declares that our sins are forgiven because Jesus took the punishment for them and the righteousness of Christ covers us. Justification is the moment of salvation, whereas sanctification is the lifelong process of becoming more holy. They are distinct but never separate. Now here’s where all of this theology becomes relevant for us: Those who are justified will be sanctified. Sanctification always follows justification. Therefore, if a person claims to have trusted Christ (i.e. experienced justification) but years and years go by with zero evidence of sanctification, they have every reason to doubt the legitimacy of their salvation. Every good tree bears good fruit. Listen carefully church: There is nothing more important in your life as a Christian than your pursuit of holiness. The reason God saved you was so that He would make you like His Son.
Romans 8:29 says, “For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers.” God sovereignly chose the people that He would save in order to make them like His Son.

And here’s how all of this is connected to authenticity: our relationships with others in the church is central to our sanctification. Hebrews 12:14 says, “Strive for peace with everyone, and for the holiness without which no one will see the Lord.” Striving for peace with everyone is a part of striving for holiness. And this holiness is so serious that without it, we will not see the Lord. We need authentic community with each other in the church to be more like Jesus. There are over 50 “one-another” passages in the New Testament (Love one another, serve one another, etc.). You can’t fulfill those commands alone. More than half of the 10 Commandments deal with our relationship with other people. All of this means that you can’t live the Christian life that God intends you to live alone.

Second, we need authentic community as a means of perseverance. By perseverance, I mean standing firm as a Christian for the long haul. It’s not easy to remain faithful to Christ for years and decades in this world. It seems like every time you turn on the news you’ll hear a story of another high profile Christian leader that has abandoned the faith or committed some great moral failure. It breaks my heart to see this, but it reminds me of the importance of perseverance. The Christian faith is a marathon, not a sprint. Hebrews 3:14 says, “For we have come to share in Christ, if indeed we hold our original confidence firm to the end.” “holding our confidence firm to the end” is the evidence that we have truly come to share in Christ. And what is fascinating about this text in Hebrews 3 is the connection between the “exhorting one another” of verse 13 and the perseverance of verse 14. This means that one of the means that God gives us to persevere in the faith is authentic community. So how do you stay in the faith for 50-60 years? Not by “feeling God in nature,” but by being rooted and grounded in an authentic community of believers that is marked by the desire to pursue Christ.

So now that we know the reasons why we need authenticity and what the purpose of it is in our lives, what does it look like? How do we live with authenticity in the church? I want us to consider together the means of authenticity. The first of these means is confession: we confess our sin to each other. James 5:16 says, “Therefore, confess your sins to one another and pray for one another, that you may be healed.” The starting point of authenticity is transparency. Remember our definition? Authenticity is a “Christ-honoring transparency.” It is being honest about what is really going on in my life. If we are going to be a church that takes holiness seriously, we must be a church that takes transparency seriously. I can’t help you work through the temptations, struggles, and sins in your life if I don’t know about them. You can’t help me work through my mess if you don’t know about it. That’s why it’s so important to be surrounded by brothers and sisters in Christ that know you and love you and can come alongside you to help you when you’re struggling.

Confessing our sin to one another may be hard and messy, but it’s so important. I think it’s something that us Protestants miss out on. While the Catholic church is wrong about the need to confess sins to a priest (because according to the Bible, Jesus is our priest, and through
Him we can confess our sins directly to God), there is something to regularly confessing our sins to another person that we often neglect. There is a great blessing that comes when we are willing to humble ourselves and confess our sin. Psalm 32:1-5 says, “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit. For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer. I acknowledged my sin to you, and I did not cover my iniquity; I said, “I will confess my transgressions to the Lord,” and you forgave the iniquity of my sin.” According to this text, keeping our sin a secret will only make us miserable. When we are willing to be honest about our sin, there is great blessing. And I promise that keeping sin a secret only digs the hole deeper. Don’t buy into the lie that you can handle whatever mess you’re in on your own without anyone else finding out. Sin has a tendency to isolate us and cause us to think that everyone will hate us if they only know the things I’ve done. But that could not be further from the truth in a gospel-centered church. True authenticity is an invitation to be honest about the sin in my life so that my brothers and sisters can walk alongside me in this journey toward holiness.

Transparency is all about honesty. And we see all throughout Scripture the value that God places on honesty. I’m always fascinated with the story of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5- “But a man named Ananias, with his wife Sapphira, sold a piece of property, and with his wife’s knowledge he kept back for himself some of the proceeds and brought only a part of it and laid it at the apostles’ feet. But Peter said, “Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and to keep back for yourself part of the proceeds of the land? While it remained unsold, did it not remain your own? And after it was sold, was it not at your disposal? Why is it that you have contrived this deed in your heart? You have not lied to man but to God.” When Ananias heard these words, he fell down and breathed his last. And great fear came upon all who heard of it. The young men rose and wrapped him up and carried him out and buried him.” I’m not suggesting that you’re going to get the death penalty for not honestly answering the “how are you” question next Sunday, this story clearly illustrates how seriously God takes honesty. We must be honest with our brothers and sisters in the church about the sin in our lives.

And I get it: Transparency is really hard. Confessing that you’re struggling with something is embarrassing and difficult. It takes humility and courage. But we will not grow as authentic followers of Jesus if we aren’t willing to be honest with the people in our lives about what is going on. I believe that every person in this room needs at least one person (and preferably a small group) that you can be completely and brutally honest with. A person you can tell whatever is going on in your life and not be afraid of being judged. A person that is spiritually mature that will pray for you and check in on you. Maybe even a person that has gone through similar experiences as you that can help guide you through it. If you’re lacking that, don’t leave here today with that unresolved. We would love to help you find a small group or other believers in this church so that you can have that accountability in your life.
The second means of authenticity in the church is this: **We forgive one another.** This is the other side of the coin to the first means. We confess our sins, and then we forgive when we’ve been sinned against. A healthy church is made up of good confessors and good forgivers. If we develop a church culture of harshness and judgementalism toward those who are struggling, we won’t actually be getting rid of sin; we’ll just be pushing it further into the dark. We’ll create a church of people who pretend to be fine on Sunday when their lives are falling apart the rest of the week. We must be a church that is quick to confess when we’re struggling and quick to forgive and support one another when we see another that is struggling.

Paul said in Ephesians 4:32, “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.” This shows that forgiveness is grounded in the gospel. We forgive because we have been forgiven much. When we consider the depth of our own sinfulness and the fact that by our sin we have offended a holy and righteous God, and yet He loved us and forgave us by sending His own Son to die in our place, we will be free to forgive others. How can we who have been forgiven so much withhold forgiveness from other people? Authentic followers of Jesus Christ are quick to confess and quick to forgive.

The final means of authenticity in the church is this: **We exhort one another daily,** just as it says in Hebrews 3:13. The Greek word translated as “exhort” is the verb form of the noun used in John 14:16 which is translated as “advocate.” It means “to come alongside and help.” This text is teaching us that we are to come alongside our brothers and sisters and help them run this race together. What does exhorting one another look like in our lives?

- It means **reminding** each other of the gospel regularly. Let the person and work of Jesus Christ be a regular topic of conversation.
- It means **warning** each other about the dangers of sin and temptation. When you see your brother or sister in a situation that can lead to sin, love them enough to warn them.
- It means **encouraging** each other when we are going through a difficult situation or struggling with sin.
- It means **worshipping** with one another regularly, both on Sunday mornings and in small groups.
- It means **instructing** one another regularly with the truth of God’s Word so that we can grow in our knowledge of God and our faith in Him.
- It means **praying** for each other regularly, both in good times and in bad. Your small groups should have time set aside in each meeting for sharing prayer requests and praying for one another. You should be daily lifting up your brothers and sisters in this church in prayer.
- It means **loving** your brothers and sisters in Christ by always seeking to do what will encourage them to pursue holiness.

And how often do we do this? Hebrews 3:13 says to “exhort one another for one hour and ten minutes every Sunday.” Oh sorry, that must be a typo. Actually, it says to exhort one
another *daily*. And just in case we don’t understand what “daily” means, the author of Hebrews adds “as long as it is called, “Today.” I love that. When is it *not* called today? Tomorrow? When tomorrow comes, tomorrow becomes today! The point, obviously, is that this practice of exhorting one another is supposed to be a regular part of the Christian life. It’s supposed to be something we are doing *constantly*. This mutual exhortation is the means that we are given so that we “will not be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.” What does that mean? It means that if we start to neglect this, we will most certainly be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. We need each other to stay on the right path.