

Why Community Groups?
The Antidote to Doubt
8/29/2021

Good morning. My name is Jesse Howard and I serve here at Cornerstone as the associate pastor of music and discipleship. We are in the midst of a short series on one of the core values of our church—Community Groups. Pastor John Marc has been preaching through the book of Revelation but each fall as our ministry year starts up, we like to focus in on the importance of Community Groups here at Cornerstone. So he gets a few weeks off and will be gone for a pastor retreat and a family wedding.

Last week we saw that God created us for community. God created us to live in fellowship with Him. But He also created us to live in fellowship with other believers. God saves individuals, but He saves them into the body of Christ. The way we live that community out is by being together in small groups as family, missionaries, and servants. At Cornerstone, we think the best way to accomplish these three aspects is in the context of Community Groups.

This morning we will be in Hebrews chapter 3. A few months back while working through chapter 3, I thought, “This is a message for our Community Group series.” I hope you see why by the time we’re done. Now I’m not going to give you a full background on the book of Hebrews this morning, but there are few big picture things I want to share with you so we better understand our passage this morning.

What is the point of the book of Hebrews? I think it can be summarized like this: Superior Savior | Enduring Faith. It’s hard to bring an entire book down to a title, at least it is for me, but I think that captures the core message of the book of Hebrews. However, I don’t want you to think that this title is suggesting there are two themes to the book of Hebrews. I believe they make up one theme. If I was able to give you a sort of expanded title it would be, “A Superior Savior Produces and Enduring Faith.” You see they are tied to together, intimately tied to together. Because Jesus is superior, or better, than everyone and everything else, genuine faith in Him will be an enduring faith, a faith that makes it to the end. When you see Jesus as better, which He most certainly is, you will never abandon your faith in Him for any lesser person or thing.

Hebrews 11:24–25 says, “By faith Moses, when he had grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, 25 choosing rather to endure ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin.” How do we live this life in such a way that when faced with the passing pleasures of sin we choose Jesus? By enduring faith in our superior savior. Enduring faith in our superior savior.

Hebrews has immense relevance for us today in the world we live in. Whether through affluence or affliction, genuine faith is tested. Whether through drifting or outright disobedience, genuine faith is tested. The temptation to defect is real. It was real for the recipients of this letter some 2000 years ago. It is real for us today.

We need a picture of our superior savior. We need to see the beauty and majesty of Christ. We need to understand that He is better than everything. We need to know His person and His works. When we behold the blazing glory of Christ it will rightfully outshine all the passing pleasures of sin. And with Christ as our focus and supreme love and joy, we will endure to the end.

But, as our passage this morning says, not all will endure. Doubt creep into hearts and some will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. Some buy into the lie, and fall away from the living God. In chapter 2 verse 3, the writer says, “How will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation?” The answer? We won’t. The only thing that will be left for us is “a terrifying expectation of judgment and a fury of the fire which will consume the adversaries” as Hebrews 10:27 says. The stakes are high. Eternal life and death are in the balance. The author calls this letter a “word of exhortation” in 13:22. I hope this morning is just that for all of us—a word of exhortation.

Turn with me in your Bibles to Hebrews 3:12–14. “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God. 13 But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called “Today,” so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.”

In these verses, the writer of Hebrews provides a stern warning against doubt and the antidote to doubt, so that we will walk in genuine faith.

The outline for our text this morning we will follow is

- I. The Danger of Doubt – v. 12
- II. The Antidote to Doubt – v. 13
- III. The Evidence of Genuine Faith – v. 14

I. The Danger of Doubt

As we just read, these verses begin with a warning. Verse 12 says, “Take care, brethren, that there not be in any one of you an evil, unbelieving heart that falls away from the living God.” I’m sure you can tell that we are dropping right into the middle of an argument the author is making. Let me catch you up. Having demonstrated that Jesus is better than the angels in chapters 1 and 2, he argues in chapter 3 that Jesus is better than Moses.

If you are familiar with Judaism, Moses is probably the preeminent figure in Jewish history. No doubt Abraham is the most important, because there would be no Jewish people without him, but when it comes to someone who was used by God and revered by the people, Moses takes the cake. For the Jews, they were children of Abraham but followers of Moses. They had lived under the Mosaic Covenant for more than 1400 years.

The audience of the book of Hebrews was professing Christians, and particularly, Jewish Christians. This group of people had come to profess Jesus as their Lord and Savior, but they were tempted to go back to the Old Mosaic system. They wanted to be Christians but live like Jews. Why? Because at this time, probably 67 or 68 AD, being a Christian could cost you your life, and often did, but being a Jew would not. So they were tempted to say, “I can be a Christian, but hide out in Judaism and I don’t have to suffer persecution.” The writer of Hebrews says there are big problems with this.

Who is better? Jesus or the angels? Jesus or Moses? Jesus or the Levitical priests? Jesus or the Mosaic System? Jesus over the prospect of escaping temporal suffering? The same questions apply to you and me. Who is better? Jesus or my job? Jesus or my house? Jesus or my comfort? Jesus or my reputation? Jesus or my family? Jesus or my life?

I hope the answer is clear to you, but it's amazing how fuzzy things can get for us when we start facing persecution.

As so the writer gives a warning. This is not the first warning in the book of Hebrews, nor is it the last. Hebrews has what most would recognize as 5 distinct warning passages. For the sake of remembering them, smarter people than I have arranged them all starting with the letter D.

- Drifting from the Word
- Doubting the Word (our passage)
- Dullness to the Word
- Despising the Word
- Defying the Word

These warnings are so prominent in the book that it is easy to think they comprise the major theme of the book. And I admit that I have largely thought of the book of Hebrews over the years in terms of its warnings. But I am coming to realize that I think that misses the point. The writer of Hebrews did not set out to write a book of warnings. The book begins with God as the main actor and Christ as the superior One, being the “[radiance of His glory and the exact representation of His \[God's\] nature.](#)” The book doesn't start with a warning.

No, as I mentioned, the theme of the book of Hebrews is we have a superior savior that creates an enduring faith. So why all the warnings? The warnings serve as the necessary implication of what happens if we neglect the superiority of Christ. If Jesus is better than everyone and everything, and He is, infinitely better...then what happens if we reject Him? A better revelation creates a greater accountability. This is how [Hebrews 2:2–3](#) says it, “[2 For if the word spoken through angels proved unalterable, and every transgression and disobedience received a just penalty, 3 how will we escape if we neglect so great a salvation? After it was at the first spoken through the Lord, it was confirmed to us by those who heard.](#)” God used angels, who are lower than Jesus, to reveal His Word in the past. What happened if you disobeyed? You received a just penalty. But now, Jesus, the better revelation has come, and we have His Word. What happens if we neglect that? How will we escape rejecting the greater revelation? We won't.

With a pastoral heart the writer of Hebrews uses both admonition and sobering warnings to try and get the reader's attention. We all need both. Sometimes we need someone to come along side us and encourage us, and sometimes we need someone to come along side us and warn us. The best approach is a combination of both. When you know a person loves you, and their warnings are accompanied by genuine encouragement, you are truly grateful.

The first words of verse 12 are, “Take care.” This is a command from a word that means “to see.” It means *watch out, consider, take heed, pay close attention, or beware*. In Mark 13:23 and 33 it is translated “be on guard.” This is a stern warning, a wakeup call if you will. *The first step toward doubt is a lack of vigilance to watch out for doubt in your life!*

What is the sin of doubting? As the writer says in [verse 12](#), it is an evil unbelieving heart. Doubt is unbelief; it is unbelief in the revelation of God, whether in His Word or in creation. In verses 7–11 the writer of Hebrews uses the Israelites who refused to go into the Promised Land as an example of what he is talking about. God told them to go into the land because He had given it to them. But they refused to believe God and disobeyed Him. As a result, God said in [verse 11](#), “[As I swore in My wrath, 'They shall not enter My rest.'](#)” For 40 years that generation wandered in the wilderness until everyone who had doubted God died.

Verse 8, quoting from Psalm 95, helps us understand what doubting looks like. It says, “Do not *harden your hearts as when they provoked Me, as in the day of trial in the wilderness.*” Do not harden your hearts. Verse 13 explains doubt similarly. “So that none of you will be *hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.*” When you doubt, you begin to sin. When you sin, you begin to doubt.

Doubting God’s Word goes all the way back to the Garden of Eden. That was the core issue Satan tempted Adam and Eve with. “Did God really say? Does God really have your best interest at heart? Will God’s Word really come true?” Doubt, doubt, doubt.

The recipients of this letter were doubting that Jesus was better. They were tempted to go back to an old inferior system. Do you remember what the Israelites who refused to go into the Promised Land said when they heard the report of the spies in [Deuteronomy 14](#)? Just what they had said multiple times before—we should have stayed in Egypt! They rally together and say, let’s find a new leader (not Moses) who will take us back to Egypt. What were the Israelites in Egypt? Slaves! They were slaves! And they asked to go back. Talk about the deceitfulness of sin.

That is exactly what the temptation for you and I is. “Don’t trust Jesus. In the end, He’s not better. What you had before is better. Sin is better.” That is the deceitfulness of sin. And perhaps the most deceitful element of sin is the lie that you can have both. But as Jesus said, you cannot serve two masters.

There are all kinds of things that tempt us to doubt the Word—experiencing persecution, or the promise of avoiding it. Experience suffering or the prospect of avoiding it. Money, family, reputation, success, comfort. Good things—like family, and bad things, like sexual sin, can all tempt you to doubt that Jesus is better. It is a lie. It is a lie from the pit of hell. Nothing is better than Jesus.

What is the result of doubting the Word? Verse 12 says it’s [falling way from the living God](#). We’ll talk about this more fully in verse 14, but it means you have no part of God. You are not in relationship with Him. To be separated from God is what [2 Thessalonians 1:9](#) says, “*These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power.*”

There are two very different ways to take this verse, and frankly all the warnings in the book of Hebrews. Some understand falling away to mean you were a part of Christ, then you are not a part of Christ. But what the book of Hebrews teaches again and again is that those who fall away never had a part in Christ. Again, I’m going to reserve some of this conversation for verse 14 as we talk about genuine faith, but let me just draw your attention to verse 6 and verse 14. [Hebrews 3:6](#) says, “*But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.*” Verse 14 says, “*For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.*” Those verses are clear. If you fall away, you were never a part of His house. If you fall away, you had never partaken in Christ.

The writer of Hebrews treats his readers based on their profession. We should do the same thing. If you tell me you’re a Christian, I’m going to assume you’re a Christian. Unless, based on what God’s Word teaches you show that you are not a Christian. Falling away from the living God means you were never a true partaker. It means you never had genuine faith.

Please don’t be confused by this, the writer of Hebrews never teaches that any sin or any slip or any fall means you were never saved. Hebrews has one of the clearest teachings of progressive sanctification in the Bible. [Hebrews 10:14](#) says, “*For by a single offering, he has perfected for all time those who are being sanctified*” (ESV). *We are being sanctified*. It is a

process. There is a finality to the person who falls away. They have turned their back on God. Doubt has taken over and they choose anything over Jesus. When that happens. You fall away.

It's a stern warning, isn't it? I would hope that everyone here and everyone listening would be saying, "I don't want to fall away from the living God!" So how are we going to avoid it? In verse 13 the writer of Hebrews gives us the antidote to doubt.

II. The Antidote to Doubt

Aren't you grateful that God does not leave us in the dark regarding the antidote to doubt? The answer is right here in [verse 13](#), "[But encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today,' so that none of you will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin.](#)" Now I'll be honest, I found this antidote to be surprising. This is not what I would have guessed would follow the word "but." Take care that there be in any of us an evil unbelieving heart, BUT study God's Word more...pray harder...focus on your walk with Christ more...get some time away by yourself...some individual form of doubling down on your convictions. These are not the antidote to doubt the writer provides. What is it? "[Encourage one another day after day, as long as it is still called 'Today.'](#)" Now do you see why this passage stood out to me for Community Groups?

The antidote to doubt is Christian fellowship that encourages one another. I said up above that the first step towards doubt is a lack of vigilance to watch out for doubt. But "taking care" to watch out for doubt is not just something you do on your own. You need fellow brothers and sisters in Christ to help you do this. You need the encouragement of Christian fellowship. Just like we saw last week, we were never designed to walk the Christian walk alone.

If I were to ask you how you can tell if you are heeding this warning, what would your answer be? How would you know you are "paying attention"? Any answer that doesn't include, "And I am regularly engaged with faithful brothers and sisters who watch out for me, and I watch out for them" is an insufficient answer. Isolating yourself from genuine Christian fellowship is a sure path to fall away from the living God.

I don't know who will and who will not hold firm in their faith to end. We know based on God's Word that all those with genuine faith will hold firm, as we will see in the next verse. But I do know this, *if you stop walking with God's people, eventually you will stop walking with God.* If you stop walking with God's people, you will stop walking with God.

As verse 13 says, the deceitfulness of sin will take over, your heart will be hardened, and you will fall away from the living God. But there is an antidote to doubt—holding fast your faith in Jesus is a community effort.

Christians aren't people who don't need warnings. Christians are people who heed warnings. Genuine believers will need someone to come alongside them and encourage them at some point. If you find yourself drifting away from the Word and fellowship, and a brother or sister says, "Hey, you look like you're starting to drift. You look like you're starting to doubt," and you say, "You're right," then you can get back on the path. The warning has worked! Believers living together in genuine fellowship encouraging one another to keep their eyes on Jesus is the God-ordained means by which we hold fast our confidence firm to the end.

Who here hasn't had dark days? Who here hasn't battled with doubt? Who here hasn't had pain and suffering that made them wonder, "Can I really trust God? Is He really going to get me through this? How can this possibly be good?" The fear of losing a loved one. The weight of

constant chronic pain. The ongoing battle with sin. A failed relationship. Wayward children. The Anxieties of life.

How are you going to get through those dark days? How are you going to fight off doubt? How are we, the people of Cornerstone, going to stand strong and hold firm to the end. Individually? Alone? No. The antidote to doubt is encouraging one another.

Do you know what it means to encourage someone? It means “*to urge strongly, appeal to, or exhort.*” It comes from two words. One means “*to the side*” and the other means “*to call.*” To call to the side of, to come to one’s aid.

Let me tell you what it doesn’t mean. [1 Timothy 5:1](#) says, “**Do not sharply rebuke an older man, but rather *appeal* [that’s the same word as encourage in Hebrews 3:13] to him as a father.**” The opposite of encouragement is a sharp rebuke. That’s not what the writer of Hebrews is calling for here. It’s not a rebuke from afar. It’s an appeal *alongside* a person. It’s not a finger pointed. It’s an arm around the shoulder.

How often are we supposed to encourage one another? [Day after day](#). Every day. Or to put it another way, if today is still called today, we should be encouraging one another. [Hebrews 10:25](#) adds, “**And all the more as you see the day drawing near.**” We don’t need less encouragement as the days go by. We need more! If you could put this antidote in a bottle, the directions would say “Take daily.” Now think about that with me. Is Sunday morning alone enough to obey this command? Let’s just be honest with each other. I can walk in here on Sunday morning fully doubting the Word and no one will be the wiser. Even from this pulpit. And so can you.

But ya know when that doesn’t work? When we are truly engaged in each other’s lives. It is uncanny to me how utterly impossible it is to try and hide things from my wife. When I’m in a lot of pain and I think I’m doing a great job hiding it, she sees right through me. When I’m upset about something, but I think I can just internalize it, she sees right through me. This is what family does. Praise God for that!

Is a Community Group once a week enough either? No it’s not, but in that small group context we’re getting closer to being able to obey this command. When I’m with people for an hour and a half or more *face to face*, it’s harder to hide things. Community Groups provide an opportunity to get to a place where you can find people to really do life with. Sunday morning and Community Group gathers are just the launch pad into deep Christian fellowship.

As believers involved in each other’s’ lives, we don’t just wait until we see fully developed doubt, we encourage one another daily through the many different challenges and circumstances that can lead to doubt. If we don’t encourage one another daily, we will be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. And we will fall away from the living God. We must take advantage of the antidote God has given us. If you are struggling with doubt, don’t run away from Christian fellowship...run towards it! I know it’s not easy. It’s easier to hide, easier to try and fix it on our own. God knows that is often our tendency. That’s why He tells us we need community!

Have you ever experienced this kind of encouraging fellowship? Christian community is not perfect. It’s not, but it is necessary. It is lifesaving. It is encouraging. I hope you have experienced it. I hope you have here at Cornerstone. I have. I have seen it in spades here. I have

seen and experienced a love for each other and encouragement of one another that I pray I never have to live without.

We have had some trying weeks at Cornerstone. Some are sick. Some are hurt. Some are lonely. Some are facing decisions that cause them to wonder if God will take care of them. Some are battling doubt. Challenges reveal the kind of community we are. I've seen so many mobilize to come alongside and encourage one another. The texts, the calls, the emails, the late nights, the sacrificial giving. This is how we stand firm. This is how we avoid doubt. Together. God preserves enduring faith *through* the daily encouragement of fellow believers. And that leads us to our final point.

III. The Evidence of Genuine Faith

Verse 14 says, “For we have become partakers of Christ, if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.” This is the evidence of genuine faith—holding fast the beginning of our assurance firm to the end.

The book of Hebrews is about genuine faith. The writer goes to great lengths to demonstrate what genuine faith is. His favorite description of genuine faith is enduring faith because that's what genuine faith is. We too often think faith is a point in time or a process. God sees faith all at once in its entirety. When He gives faith, He gives faith from beginning to end. It starts at conversion and continues on into eternity. Talk about an enduring faith!

Now I want you to look at this very carefully with me. What does the author of Hebrews say in verse 14? Let me read it again, “For we have become partakers of Christ, *if we hold fast the beginning of our assurance firm until the end.*” He makes the same argument in verse 6. “But Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, *if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end.*” We are His house, we have become partakers of Christ...IF...

If what? If we hold fast our faith to the end. The end of what? The end of life. What does this mean? Let's rephrase it. If we do NOT hold fast our faith to the end then...what?...we have NOT become partakers of Christ. The evidence of genuine faith is endurance to the end. Just like the evidence you ran a marathon is not that you were at the starting line, but that you crossed the finish line.

What would it mean if he had reversed what he said? What if he said, “If you hold fast your faith to the end, you will become a partaker of Christ”? What's the difference between the two? One is an evidence of a person who part of God's house, and one is works based righteousness to earn you a place in God's house. That's a pretty big difference isn't it?

You don't partake of Christ because you hold fast. You hold fast because you have partaken of Christ.

So the point this: if you hold fast to the end, what was true of you? You had genuine faith. You were part of God's house. If you don't hold fast to the end, what was true of you? You didn't have genuine faith. You were never a part of God's house.

How can the writer of Hebrews be so certain of this? Because God is the one who gives faith, and He only gives one kind of faith...genuine faith. And genuine faith? Holds fast to the end. Hebrews 12:2 says it like this, “Fixing our eyes on Jesus, the author *and perfecter* of faith.” Jesus is the author and perfecter, or finisher of our faith. The good work that Jesus begins in you He will bring to completion, as Philippians 1:6 says. Jesus finishes what He starts. The passage Larry read for us in Hebrews 10:23–25 is another example of enduring faith.

Enduring faith is a key theme in Hebrews. Let's look at one more verse describing genuine faith. Hebrews 13:7, "Remember those who led you, who spoke the word of God to you; and considering the result of their conduct, imitate their faith." The ESV says, "Consider the outcome of their way of life." It means look at the exit of their way of life. If you are going to have models of genuine faith in your life to imitate, and you should have them, pick the ones who endured to the *end*.

There are many examples of the kind of faith that does not endure to the end. Don't follow those examples. Don't be like the Israelites in verses 7–11. That's why the author uses them as an example. Follow the example of saints who can say with Paul in 2 Timothy 4:7, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the course, I have kept the faith."

God only gives genuine faith that makes it to the end. But the *God-ordained means* by which our faith will persevere through all trials, all temptations, all suffering, all sin, and all the schemes of the Devil, is the encouragement of a band of brothers and sisters in Christ who watch out for one another's souls.

If I could boil everything this passage teaches down to one thing I would want you to remember, it would be this: *Living a life of genuine faith is a community project*. Living a life of genuine faith is a community project. You were never designed to stand on your own. And we believe that the way this happens best at Cornerstone Community Church is through Community Groups.

Conclusion

Last week, I shared a story of the impact Community Groups had on some friends we served with in Nashville. This week, I wanted to share a testimony from some of our own members. Or I guess I should say former members because they recently just moved. Some of you know Rob and Kim Bywater. Here is what they had to say about the importance of Community Groups in their lives. And just so you know, I did not tell them what to say.

Rob and Kim Bywater Testimony

We were so blessed by our time in Community Groups at Cornerstone. Even though God has called us away, we still feel very much a part of the family there. We believe that the best way to get close to someone is to begin to pray for them, and the best way to pray for someone is to draw close and get to know them. There is no better way than in a Community Group. Pastor John Marc spoke some time ago about the needs that single people have in their lives, and how important it is for older married couples to invest in singles and be praying for them. We had no idea how important it was to invest in others' lives this way. We were not involved very much in younger people's lives and really felt they were not really interested in older couple's input. In Community Group you have older and younger as you would in a family. You have young singles, college age young people, young couples with small children, families, older couples, and older singles who have lost spouses. All becoming involved and ministering to one another. We had long forgotten the struggles that college students were going through, and even young couples with young children. We came face to face with young mothers who were going through tough divorces. We began to ask God for ways that we could become more involved in each of their lives. We began to understand as we got to know them, was that we could commit ourselves to praying daily for them. We know that we might be past what they were going through, and might not understand completely, but we know our Mighty God knows all things and has

answers. What better way to connect with others in these different groups than in a Community Group? We are no longer there in Atascadero with you all, but we are still involved in our community group (Our Family) and feel truly a part of our family. We are praying daily for some singles there, some young families, and others who will always be a part of our family through prayer. We have to honestly say that if you are not a part of a community group, there are those waiting for you, and need your involvement in their lives if in no other way then to just be praying for them as you get to know them. In Christ, Rob and Kim Bywater.

This is how the body of Christ is supposed to function. We miss all of the Bywaters and are so grateful for the time God allowed us to be together at Cornerstone. The body of Christ is unique isn't it? There is nothing like it in this world. Because of the work of our superior savior, we have been saved into a family unlike any other.

So again, my hope this week is that you have seen the essential nature of Christian fellowship that encourages one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that we would walk in enduring faith. Community Groups are the best place to engage in the body of Christ in this way. Sign up for one. Get involved. You need the body of Christ to avoid the danger of doubt. And the body of Christ needs you too. As we walk together, we watch out for each other's souls. We warn against the danger of doubt. We encourage one another as the antidote to doubt. We persevere in genuine faith together by holding firm to the end.