

Harris Creek Baptist Church  
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Series: Life Together  
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Authentic Community

1 John 1:5-10 (NIV)

**5 This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. 6 If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. 7 But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. 8 If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. 9 If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. 10 If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.**

Well, welcome everyone. My name is Scott. So glad to be here with you today. I've got a question to start us off this morning. Is there anything you currently collect or maybe something you used to collect in the past? If you are a collector or have been a collector, raise your hand real high. (Talking to people in the crowd.) Right here, what do you collect? (Man in Crowd) Hats! Wow, I like that. All right, very good. Baseball hats? Cowboy hats? (Man in Crowd) Baseball. Excellent. OK, what else? Raise your hand so I can see it. Yeah, right here? (Man in Crowd) T-shirts. Good, I Like them. OK, Baylor t-shirts specifically, sic them. What else, come on? Yeah, right there? (Man in Crowd) Shoes! Do you know JP? You guys might strike up a friendship. One more, let's hear from a lady, a female. Yeah, right here. (Woman in the Crowd) Seashells! Might I suggest moving a little bit closer to the coast; that might help you in your collection. Thank you for playing along.

So, my collection, what I collect, is a little bit strange but maybe others do too. I used to collect baseball cards. Probably a lot of us do that. I collect books now, which is a big budget item, unfortunately, in our budget. But when I was younger, the biggest thing I collected were autographs and signatures of famous athletes. So, it started when I was really young. I was on a plane ride with my mom, and a full baseball team was on the plane with us. And so, I went up and down the aisles, got signatures from all of them, I still have those today. Over the years, as I played sports and interacted with other people, I continued to collect signatures of famous athletes.

My dad died when I was four years old—or six years old. Mom remarried, and he was a good stepdad; he passed away five years ago from yesterday. A really good stepdad but my favorite thing about my stepdad was that he had access to famous athletes and so, unashamedly, I would milk that for all it was worth. He was a sporting goods representative, which meant he worked as

a middleman between a sporting goods rep or company—a company like Nike, Reebok, Adidas—and then a sporting goods store, like, you know, Dick’s Sporting Goods or Academy.

Nike would have a new product come out and my dad would hear about it. He’d go to Dick’s Sporting Goods or Sears and say, “Here’s why you need to get this product.” In his interactions with all those sporting goods companies, he would meet some of the athletes who repped their new stuff. And so, back in the day, you know, Michael Jordan repped for Nike. And so, my dad would get to meet all of these famous athletes, and then on the regular he would bring home for me a stack of signatures. So, I thought he was, like, the greatest stepdad on the planet.

I gathered them all up, they’re all in a scrapbook that I still have to this day. And about seven years ago, eight years ago, my wife Kristen and I, as we’re thinking about the future for our children, are starting to think through how we’re going to pay for our kids to go to college. And so, there’s four of them, that’s a lot and, you know, I’m on a pastor’s salary. I do just fine, but we’re not putting aside money for college plans. And they’re amazing kids, I love them; I’m so proud to be their dad. They’re good athletes, but no school is going to send them a full ride scholarship. They love Jesus a whole lot, but that’s not giving us much money either. And so, we’re trying to think through how are we going to pay for our kids to go to school. And so, I’m like, “Kristen, what about my signature collection? And so, a lot of these signatures are from famous people who are now passed away. They’re in the Hall of Fame, nobody else can get their signatures. Maybe I sell those, and we get a little bit of money. Every little bit is going to help to pay for college.”

So, I get my scrapbook out, put it on the table, and start looking through them. And I notice something is a little bit funny. It’s probably the most discerning I’ve ever been as I look through the autographs. It didn’t matter what sport they played, didn’t matter if they were male or female, it didn’t matter if they were old or young, a lot of the signatures looked pretty similar. And I’m like, “There’s no way that my stepdad would ever lie to his child and give fake signatures.” So, I call my brother, my brother’s name is Chris, he’s a cop in New Jersey, really thick New Jersey accent. And I’m like, “Chris, I’m looking through the signatures, and I’m wondering: are they real?” And he starts to laugh on the other end; he would say he started to chuckle, and he goes, “You knucklehead! Every one of them was a fraud! You thought those was real?” And he starts laughing at me again. And so, I had a scrapbook filled with pictures of famous athletes signed by my dad. And so, they are worthless, they are useless, they provide a good sermon illustration. But as a result, my children will probably never go to college. They’ll probably live at home for the rest of their lives, all because my dad lied to me.

So, I tell you that story because just like my fake, worthless, valueless, inauthentic autographs, we tend to be the same way in relationships. We’re not real. We’re not authentic. We lack value in the way that we interact with others because we’re not authentic. And today, I get the great privilege of speaking about the value of authentic community. Here’s why we all need to hear this message: we all live in a really, really, really, inauthentic, fake world. A world that values highlights on Instagram. A world that values putting our best foot forward, our best face on. We hide our mistakes. We hide our sin. It’s Sunday, this is the epitome of it. You know, “Feeling blessed, never stressed. Got that sunshine on my Sunday best.” We want to look really good, and we want others to think highly of us.

We hide all the mistakes, all the sin, and we want others to think that we're something special. But this really weird tension exists at the same time. Because while we value so much what others think, while I value what others think, we also desire to be fully known and fully loved. We want to be able to be real, to be authentic, to be free. We don't like to hide. When I'm hiding something, I'm miserable. And so, we're all in this tension of, "I care a lot of what others think, but I also want to be free. I want to be known." And so, we're stuck in this tension where we don't know how to live in a world that values perception and looking good. We desperately desire to be known and fully loved. We desire to be free.

As JP said in the video, we are starting a three-part series today called "Life Together." All about how to be successful and thrive in community here at Harris Creek. I wanted to give you a couple of thoughts. As I say the word "community," that might be defined in a lot of different ways. We can have community in a lot of different relationships with co-workers, family, neighbors, old school friends. That can be community with a lot of people, in a lot of different ways. But in this series, we're specifically talking about Life Groups and what it looks like to thrive and be successful in a Life Group at Harris Creek.

Life Groups aren't a program. It's not something that we do on-and-off. It's something that is 365 days a year. It's 52 weeks of the year. We have some amazing ministries that are more semester-based. We've got men's ministry and women's ministry, Sisterhood. We've got a marriage class, a lot of classes and ministries you can be a part of, but those are more seasonal and semester based. They're fantastic, but they're not on an ongoing basis. Life Groups go on all the time. This is where we want people to be cared for. This is where you make decisions together. This is where you are known and fully loved, where you confess, where you share, where you're challenged. Where you're admonished, where you're... The first place you go when there's something great to share and the first place you go when you're really struggling. We provide a lot of latitude in what our Life Groups do. You can study books of the Bible, you can go through video series, you can read a book together. And so, we give you a lot of freedom there, but there are a couple of things we're going to consistently call you to. We're going to call you to be authentic. We're going to call you to be biblical. And we're going to call you to be committed. That's what it looks like to live life together, and what you're going to hear about the next three weeks at Harris Creek.

This is a message for everyone. If you're in a Life Group, I really hope the application is incredibly real. That you know we need to be more authentic with one another in our group. If you're not in a Life Group and you've been coming here for a while, here's what I want you to feel. I want you to feel, when you leave today, that you are missing out on one of the greatest blessings we have on this planet. The place where we can be real, we can be known, we can be fully known and fully loved. We're going to offer opportunities in the upcoming weeks for you to be a part of a Life Group. There's a Membership Class, as Joe said, on March 23rd, and then we do Life Group 101 right after that on March 30th and April 6th. And we're inviting you and encouraging you and challenging you, if you're not in a Group, to come be a part of a Life Group. To come and live life together. And then, for those of you who are tuning in online, we're so glad that you'd tune in. We hope you keep doing so, but we want you to plug in locally. Wherever you live, find a body of Christ where you can plug in, where you can be authentic with others. And if that doesn't exist, if you can't find that church, find a few people that you can

invite over. Sit in your living room together. Watch these sermons and experience authentic community. This is a message for every single one of us.

We're going to be today in 1 John 1:5-10. 1 John is written by the apostle John. If you want to know where to find 1 John, my extra-special hint for you is that it's right before 2 John, and so go towards the back of your Bible, almost all the way to the end. I'm going to read 1 John 1:5-10. Again, written by the apostle Paul. So, John writes, starting in verse 5, **"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all. If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin. If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness. If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us."** We're going to go verse by verse through this passage to see what John has to say about authentic community. We're going to see specifically that authenticity starts by addressing our sin. Second, that authenticity is necessary for fellowship. And third, authenticity is necessary for forgiveness.

So, before we dive into the text, I think it's helpful to have a definition of what authenticity means. And so, I go to the Googles and type in, "what is the definition of authenticity?" And it says, "the state of being authentic," which is not helpful. And so, what does it mean to be authentic? To be authentic means to be real. To be genuine. To be who you say you are. That there's a consistency and a congruency between what you claim and what's actually true. Between what you claim and how you live your life. The autographs my dad got me were not authentic. They weren't real, they weren't valuable, they were not congruent with what they claimed. You might get an email from the prince of Zambia asking you for money. Probably not from the prince of Zambia. Inauthentic. We're drawn to authentic because we so rarely see it. Like, part of the reason why we love hearing from JP is because he's as authentic and real as we have ever heard. And so, to be authentic means to be real, to be genuine, to be not fake.

Let's dive into the text; verse 5, John writes, **"This is the message we have heard from him and declare to you: God is light; in him there is no darkness at all."** And so, John is saying, "This is what we have heard from Jesus; now I'm declaring it to you. God is light. There's no darkness in Him." Repeatedly in John's writings - he wrote the Gospel of John, First, Second, and Third John, he wrote the book of Revelation. Over and over and over, we see these references from John that Jesus is the Light. I'm going to read to you a few—a small sample of those.

- John 8:12: **"When Jesus spoke again to the people, he said, 'I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life.'"**
- John 9:5: **"While I am in the world, I am the light of the world."**
- John 12:46: **"I have come into the world as a light, so that no one who believes in me should stay in darkness."**

Repeatedly we see, Jesus is continually referred to as the Light, which means there's light, there's holiness, there's purity, there's an absence of sin. Where there's darkness, there is no

Jesus. And the way that Jesus works is that He comes on the earth, He provides this light for us so that we can see. And I love when the Bible matches up with physics because light works in the same way. The way you and I see is when light from a lightbulb or from the sun, reflects directly in our eye and allows us to see. Or it works by bouncing off an object and reflecting into our eye. I can see a chair because light reflects off of it. Without light, it's black. It's darkness. We cannot see.

Jesus works the same way. He comes onto the earth, and He illuminates so that we can see. Without Jesus, we're not aware of our sin. We're not aware of darkness, and so He provides the light that allows us to see where we fall short. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, in a great book, *Life Together*, says, "In confession the light of the Gospel breaks into the darkness and seclusion of the heart. The sin must be brought into the light." And so, Jesus provides the light that we need. He provides the light that's necessary for us to see. And the closer we walk with Jesus, the more we see the light of the Gospel. The more we see where we fall short. That's why, for some of you, you may say you've been walking with Jesus for a long time, and the longer you walk with Jesus the more aware of your sin that you are. I kept thinking, after walking with Jesus for 24 years, that I would not sin any longer. But the longer I walk with Jesus, the more I'm aware of my sin, because the light illuminates where we fall short.

Now what I'm going to do in the next few verses—and this may drive some of you crazy—I'm going to bounce around a little bit. I'm going to put verses 6, 8, and 10 together. They're very similar statements. They're actually 3 arguments that people are making against Jesus' claim or against John's claim about Jesus being the Light. And so, we're going to teach you 6, 8, and 10 and then we're going to come back to verse 7 and 9. Verse 6, John writes, "**If we claim to have fellowship with him and yet walk in the darkness, we lie and do not live out the truth.**" Verse 8: "**If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.**" Verse 10: "**If we claim we have not sinned, we make him out to be a liar and his word is not in us.**" John does not mix words. He is very clear.

### *1. Authenticity starts by addressing our sin.*

Authenticity starts by addressing our sin. And if we deny that we have sin, if we don't acknowledge, then we don't realize that we have a need for a Savior. And so, verse 6, we cannot claim to walk with Jesus and still sin at the same time. John says, "You're a liar. It's inconsistent. It doesn't work." It's confusing to say that I am walking with Jesus but still willingly and habitually sinning." In verse 8, he says that if we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves; the truth is not in us. We're claiming to not have any sin. And the same thing is said in verse 10. I'm claiming I don't have sin and when we do that, we make God out to be a liar.

As I reflected on those verses, I'm like, "I just don't get this argument because who could possibly claim to be without sin?" I can't go a few minutes without sinning. And right now, even as I'm on this stage, preaching the Word to you, I'm more concerned about what you think about me than what God thinks about me. Sin. I think about food that I want to eat and gluttony. You know, lust, it's just so easy to sin and so how can somebody claim to be without sin? If you do, you're ignorant. You're prideful. You're a liar. And perfectionism, the belief that you can be perfect, is a heresy. And so, we cannot claim to be without sin. Authenticity starts by acknowledging our sin problem.

Now I get, there's all kinds of reasons why you and I do not want to be authentic. In a world that values perception, we can think of a million excuses to not keep it real. These are some that I've heard recently. There's some that I've walked through and said myself. "I've been authentic before and it came back to really hurt me." "I shared in confidence, and they told everyone about what I did. I will never ever share or be authentic again." In that case, gossip has killed authenticity. You might say, "People look up to me and if I share my sin, if I'm authentic, then I'm worried about what they're going to think. They're not going to think as highly about me as I want them to." "I'm afraid of what others will think of me if I share with them." "I don't want to be a burden to others." "Everyone's got problems and mine really aren't that big of a deal. It's not like I'm, you know, cheating on my wife. It's not like I'm getting high or driving drunk. I haven't killed anyone recently." Recently. I haven't killed anyone ever, OK? That one was not mine; weird—that's a weird confession. When we do that, it's called pride. Right, when we minimize our sin and when we elevate the sin of others.

And those are all excuses to not be authentic. I mean, I had one very recently. So, last week, about 10 days ago, my family and I went and saw Sing at Baylor. We loved it. It was our first time to ever go. Saturday night rolls around and it's, you know, 8 days ago and I have a little bit of a dilemma. There's an incredible basketball game going on; Baylor is playing Kansas. It's going to be the game of the year, but I also know that they're live-streaming Sing onto my TV and so I can buy tickets and stream Sing. And so, I chose to stay home and stream Sing. My wife went to the game with my kids. She's at the game and people keep asking her, "Hey, where's Scott?" She texts me, "Several people have asked where you are, so I told them that you were at home watching Sing," and I text back and I go, "Don't do that. Lie. Tell them I'm at home working, OK? Don't tell them I stayed home to watch Sing." And I'm just managing my perception. Who cares? And so, for the record, if my wife told you that, that's not her fault - that's mine. Proudly going on record to say that I stayed home, and streamed Sing and it was awesome. And the other cool thing is that I put another TV under it and got to watch the Baylor game at the same time, so it was awesome. Dream night.

All kinds of excuses. Right? We have every reason under the sun to not be authentic. But we've got to start by acknowledging and addressing our sin. We cannot make this claim that we are without sin. It's a ridiculous, prideful claim. And so, we need to start by acknowledging it.

Second, we're going to go to verse 7: **"But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus, his Son, purifies us from all sin."** John says if we walk in the light, if we share and address our sin, we can have fellowship with him and with others.

## *2. Authenticity is necessary for fellowship.*

Authenticity is necessary for fellowship. We're completely cleansed of our sin at the moment of conversion. All of our sins are paid for. We see in Romans 8:1: **"There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus."** Our sin is paid for. It is finished. It is done on the cross. But as we sin on an ongoing basis, on a consistent basis, it messes up our relationship with others. It impairs our relationship with the Lord. And so, we need this ongoing purification and cleansing of our sin. Not for salvation, but just to rightly restore relationship. It's

like if one of my kids sins and disobeys, it hurts our relationship. We need to continue to work on it, to address the sin problem. That's what John is encouraging us to do here. That when we confess, when we walk in the light, it allows us to be restored in relationship with the Father and with others. And so, a real practical way that we get to do this with each other is in Life Groups. When we gather together with friends, we have the opportunity on a consistent basis to confess and to address where we are, and it allows us to build relationship with each other. And so, we talk often about the three questions: input, output, and confession. But I want to show you what that looks like and again address what those are. It may not be the only way to be authentic with your Life Group but it's a really, really helpful way. If you've got a better way, we want to hear it, but we encourage you to ask these questions of one another when you meet in Life Group. It allows you to build fellowship with one another.

And so, input is asking the question, "How are you feeding your soul?" What are you reading in the Bible? What is God teaching you? What are you studying in His Word? Second is the question about output: "How are you feeding others?" Are you sharing the Gospel with nonbelievers? Are you discipling others? Are you pouring into others? Are you sharing with your Life Group? And then third is confession: "How have you fed your flesh?" What's been tough on you? What's your sin struggle? Where are you tempted? Where do you need to confess that you have fallen short? And so, we encourage you to ask these questions within your Life Group.

Let me show you, really briefly and authentically (I hope) what that looks like. And so, if I'm with my Life Group guys and we're talking through these three questions. Input: what is Scott studying? I'm reading the book of Hosea right now. We're going through that on the Bible Reading Plan. It has been so good. It's challenging. And so, I'm learning more about the heart of God and how He pursues us in Hosea. Output: what am I doing to feed others? So, Kristen and I were at a pre-married retreat this weekend. We got to hang out with some pre-married, engaged couples and just got to talk about the gift of marriage. Around our dinner table, we've had some really great discussions with our boys about sin and how that affects relationships. In essence, we're kind of pouring into each other. Some of my output has been discipling my children. I've not shared my faith with anyone this week and that would be something I want to continually do on a regular basis and so I'm doing really well in output in some areas. Not doing so great in others. And then confession: you know, there's a lot of things I could confess. I don't have enough time on the clock to tell you all of them, but a few of them would be I've struggled with anger this week. I'm frustrated with a friend and some decisions he's made and that has affected the way that I've been as a pastor. It's tested my patience and I've been short with people at times. I've been ungrateful. It's dangerous right now to look at Instagram because I'm seeing where all of my friends are on Spring Break. Not that I don't love Waco, but I'd rather be in Mexico or at the beach or somewhere else. And so, I find myself comparing and being ungrateful. There have been times when I've struggled with overeating and binging. And so really sinful—it doesn't take much. And when I do that it allows me to confess my sins to the Lord and confess my struggles and my sins to others. It's a means to be authentic with those in my Life Group.

And I know this can be really difficult. It's hard to be real. Again, that tension that we care so much about what others think will drive us to the point of hiding, of not confessing, and being stuck. We'll come back to that in a minute. Let's go onto verse 9, one of the most incredible

verses in the entire Bible. 1 John 1:9: **“If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.”**

3. *Authenticity is necessary for forgiveness.*

When we're authentic it gives us the opportunity to acknowledge that we've fallen short. If we acknowledge our need for a Savior, we acknowledge our need for others to help sharpen us. And as you look at this verse, it's such an incredible verse because when we confess our sins, God is faithful. He is going to do what He says He will do. He's going to forgive us our sins. He's going to cancel the debt against us. He's going to purify us from our sin. That word "confess" the Greek word is "homologeó," which really means that I'm going to plead guilty, that I agree with God that I have sinned. I'm not going to claim, like verse 8 and verse 10, that I'm perfect and I don't have sin. Instead, I'm going to humbly acknowledge that I have fallen short. I need a Savior. I need to be cleansed and I need other people to help me become more like Christ. It's not good for us to be alone. God gives us the gift of community to become more and more and more like Jesus Christ. And so now not only do we confess to the Lord, but we also get to confess to one another. James 5:16: **“Therefore confess your sins to each other and pray for each other so that you may be healed. The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”**

As we gather with our Life Groups it ought to be a regular practice of confessing where we fall short. Of acknowledging our need for help. Of acknowledging our need for prayer. **“The prayer of a righteous person is powerful and effective.”** When we don't confess, we're cutting off the body of Christ from having the opportunity to help us grow.

Too often I have seen people hide their stuff. I've been doing ministry a long time now, coming up on almost 20 years of working with couples and working in the church. I just see the wake and the carnage of people not confessing. It breaks fellowship with others. It breaks fellowship with the Lord. People are stuck in prisons. I'm tired of seeing broken families because people make decisions that are destructive to children. They're destructive to their spouse. People who are too prideful to widen the circle when they're stuck in addiction and the cycle of sin. People living in fear that, "if you saw what was on my phone, then you would know where I've been and what I've looked at," and so they hide their phone from others. I've seen people hide their finances because they want no one to know where they've spent their money or how they've spent their money. They hide their calendar and how they spend their time because they're going to places and not using their time well. They're sinning. And we keep hiding our stuff from one another and when we do, we're stuck in a prison. Authenticity is necessary for forgiveness and it's necessary for freedom. And we miss out when we aren't living authentically in community.

I want to just share with you, practically, what this can look like in your Life Group. And so, just this idea of, "What does it look like to confess?" Maybe you've never seen it modeled well and so I want to help you right now. A few things that I think will be incredibly beneficial and practical for you and your Life Group:

- 1) Confess early. So often we wait too long. We wait until after we have actually sinned to confess and "it's better late than never." But what I would suggest is that you would confess early. That you would confess as soon as you are thinking about struggling, that



you would widen the circle and invite others in. And so, if I'm tempted to go look at a website that I know I shouldn't look at, before I go look I'm going to text my wife, I'm going to text my Life Group. I'm going to say, "Hey, pray for me right now. I'm tempted to do something I know I shouldn't do. Would you please pray for me and then ask me and make sure I didn't choose to go that route?" Maybe you're tempted to go get a drink and you're an alcoholic. The time to confess is not when you're at the bar but before you go, while you're thinking about it. So, confess early. Bring others in. Don't isolate. Proverbs 28:13 [paraphrased]: **Whoever conceals his sin will not prosper but if you confess and forsake your sin, you will find mercy.** And so, confess early, before it's actually a real problem.

2) Confess often. And so, it's not like, "Hey, I confessed one time in Life Group a couple months ago. I'm good. Let's wait. Man, it's March 6th today. I've got like 10 months where I can be confession-free and then you'll get another one from me in January of 2023." That is not how this works. You ought to be able to confess something every time you meet with your group. Make that a regular practice in community.

3) And then what do you confess? You confess any sin. You confess where you're falling short. You confess anything you'd be ashamed of others seeing or knowing that you did, where you went, or what you did.

4) And then confess in detail. Be precise. Be specific. Don't just be general, like "I'm struggling. Pray for me." Tell them what's going on. Give details. Don't go 98 yards, go the full way. Get the touchdown. Go 100 yards and be precise. Share the last two percent. Be careful that you don't share too many details that are going to cause others to stumble, but get in the practice of being honest and precise when you confess.

5) And then what do you do when you're in a Life Group and somebody confesses? They're about to drop a bomb on you. What's your response? How do you handle that? And this is really, really important. Because your response to somebody else's confession will largely dictate their response moving forward. If somebody confesses their deepest darkest sin, and you laugh at them or you go, "No, you didn't! There's no way you did that!" or, "You did what?" they're not going to confess again. Your response is really, really significant. When somebody confesses, realize that it's a vulnerable act. That the Spirit of God is working in them to lead them to confess a sin or struggle to you. The 30 seconds after somebody confesses might be the most important 30 seconds in that person's life. Because the way you respond will dictate whether or not they're going to confess again. Whether or not they're willing to share. If you laugh, if you shut them off, if you knock them down, if you invalidate them, they are not going to share again. You thank them for sharing. You're gentle with them. You're kind with them. You encourage them. You pray for them. You follow up with them. You don't just let them share. This is, like, one of the biggest problems is somebody shares a huge struggle in Life Group, and you go, "Thanks for sharing that," and you move on and you never do anything about it. And so, follow up with them. Be a good partner in community. Sometimes we confess sin that's serious enough that we need to widen the circles. If it's illegal, if it involves others, we might need to widen the circle, but your job is to let them know how grateful

you are that they confessed. That they know that you are listening and that you care for them.

And so, I want to review before we wrap up. Authenticity starts by addressing our sin. Authenticity is necessary for fellowship. Authenticity is necessary for forgiveness.

I became a follower of Jesus Christ at the age of 24. So, the first 24 years of my life were filled with pretty rough living, pornography and drugs and alcohol and getting drunk, getting high, having sex, doing all the stuff the world offers. At the age of 24, I trust in Jesus. My eternity changes and a lot of that stuff starts to go away. I stop getting high. I stop getting drunk. I stop having sex. I start going to church. I'm in Bible study. I'm reading the Bible. I'm praying. I'm sharing my faith. I'm memorizing Scripture. I'm doing all of this awesome stuff and I've stopped a lot of the really bad. But something that I continued doing even after trusting Christ is that I kept looking at porn. I was absolutely addicted and was terrified of telling anyone.

And so, I'd go to church every Sunday. I'd go to Life Group every Monday night with my other single guys I was in community with. I'd go read my Bible. I'd pray. I'd share my faith and meanwhile there's this block between me and my relationship with the Lord because I know I'm not dealing with some sin. I'm not truly authentic with my friends in my Life Group, with Jeff, and Dan, and Mark, and I'm not being honest with them about my sin. And every week, I'd go to Life Group, and we'd sit, and we'd talk about how great Jesus is and then I leave and I go look at porn. And this happened week after week after week.

Finally, one day, I remember so distinctly, I remember so many of the details. We're sitting down at Dan's apartment around his living room and in my mind, I'm going, "I need to confess. I need to confess." But it was the scariest thing that I knew that I could ever do because I didn't know what was going to happen. I didn't know if they were going to laugh at me, if they were going to kick me out of the church, if they were going to kick me out of their group. I thought they were going to tell the senior pastor on me. And so, we sat there. And we got up to leave. I call them back. I go, "Hey, I need to share something with you." I closed my eye and I just confessed for the first time ever out loud to anyone, that I was addicted to pornography, that I needed help, that I was tired of lying and tired of hiding. I was tired of not being real with them. And I remember when I opened my eyes, you know, what I expected was people were going to laugh at me and mock me. Instead, one guy raises his hand and says, "Yup. Me too." Another guy says, "Thank you for sharing. I've been waiting for somebody else to go first." Another guy goes, "That was really courageous. I'm so glad that you were authentic and real with us."

And then we went to work together. We went to war together. The other guys addressed stuff. One guy confessed to same-sex attraction. Two or three other guys addressed that they were also looking at porn. And so, we went to work, man. Our group changed that day. That authenticity breeds authenticity. I was able to say with those guys, probably for the first time in my life, that I was fully known and fully loved. It felt like in Genesis 2 when it says that the man and the woman were together, they were naked and there was no shame. I was able to be with them and not be ashamed. And we got to work. We held each other accountable. We prayed for each other. We did whatever it took to address our sin. Probably for the first time in my life, I felt free.

I am certain that there are some in this room right now, some who are tuning in right now, who are locked in a prison because you're not willing to confess. You're not willing to be authentic. You're not willing to be real with others. I want to give you twenty seconds right now just to pray. What is it that you need to be authentic about?

I want to be a part of a church where we feel the freedom to be honest and to be real. I was with some friends yesterday and one of them said, in talking about their sin, they said, "You know, you can't bring your dirty laundry to church. The church can't handle your mess and your dirty laundry." I just wanted to go, "What am I supposed to do with it, then?" Right? If I can't bring my stuff to this place, to the body of Christ, to my Life Group? If I can't be authentic with God's people, then what am I supposed to do? And I just want to encourage you and lovingly challenge you to bring your dirty laundry, literally or figuratively, to Life Group. If you would be authentic, you would be real, you would be honest, you would be open, your relationships will have value. You will find freedom. And I know some of you are terrified. You're thinking, "Nobody else in my group is authentic. I'm not going to do it." I'm going to say, "go first." Be willing to bring your mess. To be honest. To be broken. To be real. You're not alone. Every single one of us is a sinner in need of a Savior. Let's be a body of Christ where we are authentic. Let's be authentic in our Life Groups. If we do, we will experience freedom like we never have before. We're not intended to live life alone but to live life together and to be authentic as we live together. Let me pray that you would, and I would.

God, help us. We are stuck in a prison of worrying so much about what others think of us. Help us to be real, to be honest, to be genuine. Help our relationships to be authentic and valuable. Help those in this room who are just terrified of being honest and being open, of the way they're going to be perceived, I pray that they would find freedom in confessing to you and others. I pray you would help us as others confess to know how to rightly respond, to love others in confession. That you would give us the right words to say. That we would be prayerful. That we would go to war together to address sin. And God, I pray, as a body, that we would be a body of Christ marked by authenticity because we know it allows us to become more and more and more like your Son, Jesus. We desperately need your help. We love you. In your name we pray, amen.