

[Pastors Lee Wiggins & John Lawley]

Last week we talked about John 15 and we talked about the vine and we talked about that Jesus said I am the vine, we are the branches, and it talked about that we get all of our nourishment from the vine. And here's what we said then so we say today, what we've been saying through this entire series called NEXT, today's



our last day of the series of NEXT. Next week you gotta come back, we start a new series called BROKEN DREAMS, studying the book of Ruth, it's gonna blow your mind, you gotta be here, it's an amazing story. But this is huge, this is the building block, this is what we want for you: When we are attached to the vine it's then and only then that growth occurs. And if you really want to just live the Christian life to the fullest you've got to be attached to the vine.

And we really here at Calvary and the Word of God resist this idea of work—every other religion works their way to God, God came to us. And so when He talks about us being on the vine, we talked last week when you start blooming, when you're that flower, when you're that fruit that's coming off of that vine it isn't because you're sitting there making that happen. You don't see fruit just pulsating on the tree, on a limb. No, it's just the limb, the tree, the vine is just putting all the nutrients into that fruit, that's who Jesus is making us to be. And so this morning we really want to focus in on Jesus and being attached to Him. I want to know Him that's why I go to His Word, that's why I want to keep on encouraging you to go to His Word. I want to hear from Him, that's why I pray to Him, it's why I talk to Him. That's why we have spiritual conversations that He's at the center of because when He's at the center of our conversation He's at the center of what we're thinking and doing and living out.

And that's why John and I really feel strongly that in order to stay attached to the vine one of the biggest things that helps is when you're part of a community, and you're part of that, look at you in here. That's why we can sing that together, that's why you have this team here putting their arms around each, they love each other. They'd stand up for each other all day long. They call each other when they're in trouble. And we just think that we need to be in that community and that that'll help us to really grow in Jesus. And so we want to talk a little bit about that today.

Now here, I want to throw this out before we start, here's the cool thing. We are not having this conversation today because it's not happening here at Calvary, it's happening here at Calvary. Pastor Mike is phenomenal about keeping track of everything and here's what he tells us, that there's a – and I'm just gonna go round numbers – a little over 900 people in this church who are actively, regularly involved in groups and community, 900-plus people. And then he reports to us every week how many people that given week actually participated. So it's one thing to have a sign-up list, it's another thing to actually have the real people participating. Over 6– I think it was 633, over 600 people this last week of that 900 and some 16 people were actually in a group together doing life together. And to me that is just phenomenal.

So here's what we know, probably half to two-thirds of you in here you're already going, "Oh, yeah, let me tell you about my group, let me tell you about my community, I'm dialed in." And so, well done, and I'm hoping that you will tell someone in here it's worth it, jump into that before you leave this place today. But I wanted to have a conversation with Pastor John. You know Pastor John shares the Word of God often here at Calvary and we just love having Him share, and he and I love thinking through these series and these messages and the Scripture together and thinking how can we help you, just encourage you and your walk, and what's the best way to say that, who's the best one to communicate that in a given week. And so when we got to the end of this NEXT series we were just, like, we've gotta, I don't know, we've gotta make this really actionable today. And we we've been just talking about groups a lot.

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John: Yeah. Yeah, so one of the questions we had was, like I always try to ask the question: Is it relevant to the people that come?

Lee: Yeah.

John: Is it? And let me just paint the picture. I think one that one of the questions we had was: Do we want to say to you, "Hey, get connected to community" and for you to receive it as, "Okay, I'm at capacity. I'm a busy person."



Pastor Lee Wiggins

Pastor John Lawley

Lee: Yeah.

John: "I got sports on Monday, sports on Tuesday, school Wednesday-Thursday, I have no time and so you just want me to can I take this next step and kind of check off this box."

Lee: Yeah, no.

John; Like, I wouldn't want that because I have tons of things happening, so the question becomes WHY community?

Lee: Yeah.

John: And you look at your life and you ask the question. So one of the things I think is very clear in Scripture is that you are made by a relational Being. God is, the Trinitarian nature of God is relational. So He creates Adam and Adam is satisfied in God but he wants a relationship because he is created by a relational Being, and so we are going to have community in our lives, every one of us, because we are created that way. And part of how God wired us is we attach to things that we feel are greater than ourselves, something that is a cause greater than ourselves. And so if we kind of paint the picture of that over your life it looks a lot of different ways, but we have this desire for community. It's in us. And so for some of us it could be a sports team that says hey, being part of these fans and having the Super Bowl and winning is a cause and I can get a part of it and I can be a part of it, and it's attractive.

Lee: Yeah.

John: Or even some of us it's maybe fitness, to say I have this goal and I'm attracted to this environment where people are supportive and they're encouraging and they build me up. And I think as human beings we flock to those environments.

Lee: And we wouldn't say those environments are bad.

John: Not at all. It's just in our DNA. And so when we ask this question about community we all kind of find community, but the question I think we're asking is: Is it a gospel-centered, biblically, Kingdom-focused community because ultimately God has wired you to be part of that community, that's why you desire community in the first place. And so for some of us the question we have to ask is: Does the community I'm part of, so maybe some of us, we spend most of our free time with our old college friends or high school friends or maybe coworkers and we say that's my community, the question is do they kind of draw you towards that vine. Is it about Jesus? Is it something where you are loved the way Jesus is calling people to love you and to be loved? And are you able to extend that love to others? Is the point of your gathering about Jesus? If not, then there'll be a void in your heart about this true biblical community that we're

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talking about. And so in that conversation, you know, we have to understand that we can't just say, you know, I don't need that because I think God's wired us to desire it, and so the question becomes is it a community attached to the vine or is it about something maybe shallow, superficial conversations, or maybe about self?

Lee: So we're involved in a lot of different communities throughout the week.

John: Right.

Lee: You've named off a few of those,

John: Yeah.

Lee: and those communities have value to each one of us

John: Absolutely.

Lee: and we would even encourage people to be involved in those communities because we can shed the light of Jesus in those communities, but there's something more.

John: Yeah, and, you know, I had this conversation with our small groups about, really, the question of why do you want community and what's different between this community and the ones that you have?

Lee: Yeah.

John: And so they just had some conversations about that and we had, it was pretty fascinating, we said, "Are there things about, like, small groups at your house," which is one of the many ways to have community, "is it hard for you to come every week?" And everyone was like yes, of course it's hard, because we have school and homework and family obligations, and we made these decisions [*counts off on his fingers*] every month

[CROSSTALK]

Lee: [*looks at his watch*] I think we're gonna just not gonna go to night.

John: Absolutely. We're tired,

Lee: And it's like, it's a good excuse.

John: Absolutely. And then after the conversation we said, "Does anybody leaving regret that they came?"

Lee: As you worked through it.

John: And they said no, we never – because when we leave the conversation and the point of that community makes us have great conversations with our spouse, makes us want to fall in love with Jesus again that week. It makes us want to be better parents, it stirs our affections for Jesus because we're talking about the things of God, we're encouraging each other, we're building each other up and we're really attacking the battle ahead of time. And so it was so valuable. And some of them were like, "Yeah, our marriage has been blessed by the conversations that we had after the group for hours." Because they recognized that though they had these communities, my kid's sports teams and my football teams and all this, they didn't have the opportunity in those communities to have some of the conversations that they really needed to have. They were a lot of surface, shallow, and these gospel-centered communities allowed them to talk about some really tough things.

Lee: Well, I know you told me that a lot of the people in your group said that life has a way of pulling you away from Jesus all week long.

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John: Yeah.

Lee: So you get into that moment here on a Sunday morning, then you leave, but by the time they get to your group it's – they need that and it gets them back talking about it again. So they talk about what they heard here on their way home, maybe later on today, but by the time they have the group and then it opens up a conversation and new thought processes and even a real practical way of applying. Because we're Bible people here, you know, we're going to be taking to the Word of God, we're gonna be talking about what the Word of God says about it, and yet making it real in your life.

John: Yeah, my wife and I had a conversation about, like, why do we go to group? Like, why do we have a gospel-centered community that we, because listen, we have to make these conversations in our home. Okay, my daughter has practice on Monday, my other daughter – right? So your schedule fills up and we have to make a value conversation and here's what we say, it's not that any of these things are bad but we need, as followers of Jesus, we need to be loved by people who love Jesus and we need to love others the way Christ calls us to love. Love thy neighbor, so we need to love like Jesus and be loved like Jesus, and we need our children to be in that environment, to see their parents being prayed over and praying over, and we need our children to understand that this community that we're called into as believers, that we've been rescued into, is something that's eternal. And some of these things that we do are not bad, they're experiences,

Lee: Yeah.

John: but unless we can say as a family we're gonna use these experiences and maybe foster a gospel-centered community in that, like, maybe we need to create it in those experiences, we still need that as a family. We need something that's different than the sports, that's different than the school, because we are called to be part of something greater than just as things of this world. And so now you were

[CROSSTALK]

Lee: You were telling me that in your community, in your group, you have found that that's where you and your wife find belonging. It's also, those people there, you, I mean, they become your people and we all, I think, there's a belonging that we all look for. But that whole concept that you're talking about, how to be loved, life happens, stuff's going on, difficult things are happening, and to have a group of people that surround you in that time. We all want that, we wish for that, but we don't really want to invest

John: Right.

Lee: into developing that. A number of years ago I recognized something because we were encouraging people to be in groups, and people had come to me, everything was falling apart in their life and they're like, "I need to be in a group!" and it was at that moment that I realized that that's almost too late because, while we want you to jump into a group at that point because we're here for you, no matter how – wherever you're at, we'll take you right where we've got you, but it's really hard to jump into a group at that point because you don't have that camaraderie, you don't have that relationship. And so groups are best that when life happens that you're already in that group. And all of us know life will happen and so if you're already in a group and you've built those friendships and those relationships and you've served them, now in that moment they'll serve you and they'll love you when you need to be loved. Just a huge, huge moment.

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John: Yes. And to echo that thought, like, to really flush this out, I want this to really be something we all hear.

Lee: Yeah.

John: Like, like a lot of times in church you'll come to church and you're divorced and you'll say, "I need help."

Lee: Yeah.

John: Right? And as a church we want to come alongside of you, we want to love you, we want to point you to a community, but what we miss often is we should have been in it at the beginning of the fight.

Lee: Yeah.

John: Like, you should come into your community and have a group of people and say, "Hey, I'm struggling, my marriage is struggling. Hey, come alongside of us, speak life into us, pray for us, battle this thing with us." So oftentimes we don't see the value of community until we're broken.

Lee: Yeah.

John: When community God has given us to fight the battles together, and so for us we're like, we're good with church being on Sundays and having these superficial things to be enough until we fight the battle and then we wait until the end of the battle to actually see the need of community. And what we're trying to say is no, community should be part of your pattern so when the battles come and they will – my children are running away from the faith or my family is or I'm sick

Lee: Financially, yeah.

John: or I'm in the hospital, or financial, you have brothers and sisters in Christ who are linking arms.

Lee: So here's the pressure John and I struggle with so much is church over maybe the last twenty years has been all about these modules that you plug'n'play. So come in for this class, we're gonna do a class on finances. Come in for this class, we're gonna do a class on this. Oh, you're struggling with your finances, oh, we can do this for you. And so we just have these plug'n'play modules. And, oh, you need a pastor to come see you at the hospital, okay, we will dispatch a pastor to come see you at the hospital. But what we know and that we want for you is when you live in community all that's taken care of.

John: Yeah.

Lee: You're struggling financially, you talk about it in your group.

John: Yeah.

Lee: You're struggling with parenting, you talk about it in your group. We don't need to have a special class about it, there's someone in that group that's figured that out. Now we all begin to work that with each other and we're helping each other. Someone's hurting financially and they don't have enough, all of sudden we're like taking food over to their house, we're filling up their tank with oil, but that's because that's what we do when we're a group linked together and we care for each other. And that's a whole lot better than going, "Do we have a class right now on anxiety?" No, we have a group that we're part of and some of us in there are struggling with anxiety, some are just struggling with finances, whatever it may be we're here for each other. We just feel like that is best done in a community.

And I was talking to—I work with a number of different churches and helping churches—and I was talking to this one church and we did this survey of the church trying to figure out what was

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going on there and trying to help them. And the survey came back that the thing that everyone loved about that church is that they felt so close with each other and felt so connected. Well, the pastor was real concerned. He's like, "They don't notice our great music and, like, maybe they don't like my sermons. And, you know, we've got all these classes on Sunday and no one attends them, and all they said on this survey was how much they liked each other." And I said, "That's great news because as the body of Christ there's a community, a common unity around Jesus Christ, and we're encouraging and we're helping each other."

And so that's, today, we're really wanting to just invite you into that. Those of you who are part of the 900 that have already jumped into that, to just get a new vision, a bigger vision. I mean, I know your group [*speaking to John*], you guys do – you serve people together even outside of your group, you invite people from your neighborhoods into it, so it's not just people, I mean, it's just amazing. I'm part of a group and it was funny because John and I, we went into our groups this last week sort of wanting to ask some questions about hey, why do you come to this, what matters and this kind of thing. So I jumped into my group and I'm about ready to ask that question and one of the guys in the group just starts talking and he starts talking about how much the group meant to him for the last year. I'm like wow, I didn't even ask the question yet. Because those have you have been in that you know that's the case. The hard part is how do you get into it and how do you get into the right one, and it's not a really good time right now, I don't know, it's a busy time of life and, I mean, you've got how many, six or eight daughters?

John: I don't know, I lost track.

Lee: You lost track.

John: Yeah.

Lee: How many more do you have coming? I mean, [*puts his hand up*] don't answer, don't answer. So, um, whatever the Lord wants. Okay, so, but here's the deal, I mean, is this amazing? It's just amazing how life catches us busy and there's this moment where we stop and go, "You know what, I need to jump in. I need to do it. I need what they're talking about." But I wanted to throw out one last thing before we talk about how to jump in and do it.

So we were talking in our group about these groups and this one guy in our group says, he actually says he's been at Calvary for a very long time and he's young but he's been at Calvary for a long time and he says, "Calvary's always had a major push for groups. It's just been part of our DNA. It's who we are." That's why we have over 900 people involved in groups. And he said every time we did one of those Sundays where they push you, he says, "You know how they do this, they set up tables and stuff." I said, "I know, we're gonna do that this week." He goes, "Uhhh." And I said, "I know." He said every time you did that he'd go yeah, that's fine, I hope they all jump in. I'm not doing it. He said, "I did that for many, many years." And he says, "Then last year you walked up to me and you said, 'Will you be in my group?' " I had prayed about it, you know, who did go to and I invited him into my group. And he goes, "I'm just gonna tell you this last year has been amazing, my growth, my just – it's changed my thinking process, it's changed my relationships, it's just huge."

And it just reminded me of something is we need to invite each other. I was talking to a man this week who I think they just moved and they're now about a half-hour north of here where they live, and I guess it's farther away from where he used to go to his group or something like that. So he and his wife decided we're gonna get the clubhouse in our neighborhood and they prayed about it and they actually are giving it to him rent-free, and they're just putting a thing out to all their neighbors going, "Come study the Bible with us." And people are showing up.

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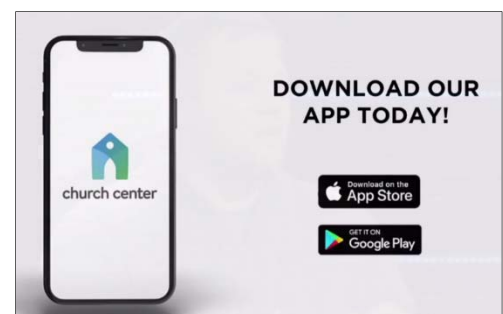
So, you know, we're really, John and I will tell you here in just a second, we're not wanting to be real formulaic about. Like, you have to come to *our* 10 groups or our 50 groups or 500 groups, however many we have, or groups have to look like this. As you'll see, we have groups that look a lot of different ways including things where you serve, like these guys are doing [music team], like, they are a group. I mean, they're spending a ton of time together. We have a group right now at this very moment right outside those doors, they call themselves "Bagel Co," a bunch of young couples that have a bunch of kids and they can't figure out how to do it during the week.

You know, when you have 5,000 kids around and they're running like crazy it's hard to do a group and trying to get them out of the house all this kind of stuff, so they all just sit out here and eat church-provided bagels and coffee and have their group after the first service and it's a phenomenal thing. We don't care how you do it, what we do care about is that you get in relationship with each other and begin to grow with each other and care for each other.

So Pastor John, you have done an unbelievable job at helping us organize this, automate this, make it simple. One of things I love, you're gonna show us about the app and the website. When we first started this I'm like, yeah, without pieces of paper this is gonna be tough. I mean, how are they gonna know where to go? And we introduced the app and I'm like, "No one's gonna download the app." You know, you can't get free coffee from the app, you know, that's only the reason I download an app, if I get free points or free something-or-other. I'm like, "No one's going to download the app." And sure enough tons and tons and tons of people are downloading the app, more people are finding groups than ever on the app, and what everyone's just saying is, "This is so intuitive. I don't have to call into the office and then get false leads. I get it exactly dialed in." You've like organized this, you're gonna direct us on how to jump in, walk us through this.

John: Yeah. And just, my pastor hat says one more thing. I want to say I hear this a lot and I just want to kind of fight the enemy on this. If you think it's me and Jesus and that's all I need—we are people of The Book, that's not in here. You need community. You need people to come alongside of you, to love on you, to help fight the battles. As you have been rescued, your old self has been put to death in Christ Jesus, you are now called to be part of this community that's eternal. So if you have the mindset "me and Jesus is all I need," it's not biblical. That's an individual culture, self-centered culture that we live in. Right? And so that's a weak group culture that we live in. We're very individualistic, that's not biblical, so you need this. You need it to stir your affections for the Lord, to grow you, to challenge you to serve, to love on you, to fight battles for you. And so because we know that and as a conviction on our heart, we wanted to create tools because here's the amazing thing.

Ever since I came to Calvary, I can attest to this, we have so many amazing things that were happening, no one knew what was happening. And we were like okay, how do we bridge this gap? We have we have amazing communities and no one knows, and so we just wanted to implement some tools to allow you to see what we currently have. And so many of you know that we've introduced an app called Church Center, which when you click on Church Center and you highlight "Calvary Fellowship" you can create an account, you can sign up for events, but what you also can do is see all the group categories that we have available, but you're going to also be able to see in our gym after this service. And so if you're a man and you want to see all the men's groups,



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you can just click on that category, see all the existing men groups. Women, same thing. If you are interested in maybe short-term trips, you can go to our short-term trip link and you can see all the current trips or the ones that are going out this year.

Lee: If you wanna sign up for an 8-week trip.

John: If you want to sign up for an 8-week group, we're gonna actually be starting here for the Ruth series, and you just want to step into an 8-week group and we're gonna have –

Lee: Just try it out.

John: yeah, we're gonna have some leaders kind of guide those conversations through video, it's gonna be a really powerful way to just introduce you to groups, no pressure, just an opportunity. And so some of you, if you are interested in playing softball, we have recreational groups, badminton, all these different opportunities. And we're going to really allow you this morning to have some refreshments and interact with some of those group leaders, but we want to just remind you that the tools are always available. If you don't like the app, you can always connect using the seatback cards in front of you, or you can go on our website, the group types are listed there, but what we want to do –

Lee: Or the blue wall.

John: or the blue wall, right, or the blue wall.

Lee: You have many options.

John: Absolutely. The goal again is for you to find community and that's gonna look a lot different for a lot of you, but we want to challenge you today to stick around, have conversations. But I want to also mention something, too. When you go into that app and you see some of the options, you may have something that is not there. Maybe you are passionate about something and you're asking this question: How do I make this about Jesus? I would encourage you, if it's not part of



our community, start one, join and lead a group. We have a lead a group option where you can sign up a group, tell us what it's about, we'll put it on the platform. I have heard testimony of men coming to the Lord through fishing. I have heard testimony of so many things, so if you think that *I'm a single person and I don't think there's anything fitting me* – start something. Make it about Jesus, reach people for the Gospel. Because God calls us as leaders to equip you and these are the tools we're using so that you as saints can do the work of the church. The church changed the world when the outside world

saw a community of people and said they love different,

Lee: Yeah.

John: they do things differently, and the Bible says that they will be drawn to Jesus

Lee: People want to be part of that.

John: by how we love each other, and so this is our tool.

Lee: And if you can't find anything after all of that,

John: Yeah.

Lee: Pastor Mike is over there [*points to his left*].

John: Absolutely.

8 WK BROKEN DREAMS GROUP

JOIN A GROUP

LEAD A GROUP

<https://www.cfdowningtown.com/groups>

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Lee: And if you can't figure out all that, we'd love for you to start something. And there's on the website is there a place for you if you want to

[CROSSTALK]

John: Yeah.

Lee: start a group.

John: You can also go to Lead A Group table in the gym. Let me show you the tools that we have. In the gym you're gonna see all these different tables and it's really well done, our leaders did an amazing job,

Lee: And there's food.

John: there's food, yeah. You're gonna see cards that look like this [*he holds one up*], this will allow you to see the different group categories, get directly connected to those groups. You'll also see as you walked in here, hopefully, a lot of you were handed, if not, you'll be handed as you walk out, this little packet. What you'll see in this packet is a list of just some of our groups that we have right now available and you'll see categories in black. And so what this is going to be is almost like a little directional guide for you, so if you're interested in one of these groups just go ahead and see what number is by that group type and then on the back is a map. This map will kind of give you the map of the gym and where that group type is located. So as we dismiss you this morning we're going to welcome you to walk through the gym, interact with some of our group leaders, get connected. And for some of you who are already leading a group or already connected, just be a part of that and welcome others to your group, invite others to be unconnected.

Lee: Yeah. Even find someone in this room and ask them if they're part of a group and ask them to be part of your group. And I think it's probably true that even with all the stuff we have available, if every last person that came here today wanted to be in a group, we probably don't have enough.

John: No.

Lee: That's okay. So just jump in and do it. And some of you are already part of a group. I had someone this earlier today say, "Well, I'm part of a group twice a week at my work, it's not really part of Calvary, does that count?" I just – this isn't about us, we just want to help you. We just want to encourage you in your growth and what's next in your life.

So, fun thing right now, we're gonna in just a second I'm going to pray us out, we're gonna go through that door straight across the Café and into the gym. There's food in there, they have handouts in there, all sorts of fun. I was in there between services and it was just craziness in there. Even if you want to serve, a lot of people will tell you they're serving, that that's a group, that, like, they have a real close bond as a result of that, so I'd like to invite you in that.



Jesus,

Thank you for our church, for each person in this room. Thank you for, I just think back to the book of Acts where they were getting together in homes all the time and You were adding to their numbers the Scripture says daily, and so I pray that You would do that; more people who come to You. And Lord, I pray that we'd be able to keep on pointing each other to Jesus first.

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Thanks, Lord, that this is a church where we care a lot about the next generation where we're just always having a Christ-first experience and where we'll just gather together in community to make a difference for the world. We love You.

In Jesus' Name. Amen.

I pray that you all have a great week. Go over there, check that out and jump in, and next week back for the new series called **BROKEN DREAMS**. Invite someone. You know people that this is what they need to talk about, invite them here. God bless you. Have a wonderful Sunday.

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Keywords: group, community, join, lead, start, jump in



Calvary Fellowship Website: <https://www.cfdowningtown.com/watch>

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