

Thank you for taking a bold step forward in the life of our church. As a group, we were not satisfied with our mutual discipleship. We didn't **connect** very well, our physical and spiritual **care** for each other was not acceptable, we didn't **converse** about God enough or at all or in a way that prompted each other toward Christlikeness, and our **chasing** of the lost, the fringe, and the wandering left much to be desired. We had to take an honest look at ourselves, be willing to address our failures, and make the necessary changes if we were going to be obedient to our Lord in the fulfillment of our responsibilities to each other and to the lost. And so, we chose to abandon the Christian buffet of "take what you like and leave what you don't like" in favor of identifying what all of us do **together**. Here's what all the people of First Calvary Baptist Church do. We **worship** together. We **learn** together, and we **live** together.

The worship part wasn't too difficult to emphasize. We gather every Sunday morning at 10:30am to meet with God. None of us is surprised that this is an expectation of a Christian church. What is more basic than meeting together for worship? Doesn't every Christian do that? Every Sunday morning **the whole church** gathers to worship **together**. We sing, we pray, and we listen to God as He speaks to us from His Word – the Bible. The experience cannot be duplicated in private but **must be shared** with others who know and love our Lord Jesus Christ. To be a part of the First Calvary Baptist Church is to meet God in worship every Sunday morning.

Every Sunday morning **the whole church** gathers to learn **together**. We study God's Word for the purpose of learning what biblical Christianity is by learning the Bible **together**. This was a significant change for us. Our multiple adult classes merged into one class across demographic lines with a heavy emphasis on student learning. No one learns by just soaking in data; instead, learners meet expectations for knowing content and being able to communicate it back to your pastors and other believers. No doubt some of you experienced quite the shock as you have been asked to memorize, study during the week, practice your skills, and submit to accountability. None of this is easy, but all of it is necessary for a disciple to learn Christianity. To be a part of the First Calvary Baptist Church is to learn **together** every week in our adult education hour.

While I do not have the benefit of the full history of our church, knowing the history as I do, I do think it is fair to say that the biggest change in the life of our church was our move to small group philosophy. Not all of us understand why the move was necessary. For some, I'm sure, we moved to small groups because "this is what Pastor Mike and Pastor Chris want." While it's true that this is

where we have led you, our move to small groups goes way beyond personalities. We moved to small groups because we were missing a major component of biblical Christianity – **together**. Some people call it community. Others like the term fellowship. I prefer **together**. God intended that believers approach every day, every circumstance, and every opportunity from the vantage point of **together**. That’s what is behind the Bible terms “body” and “building” and “family,” New Testament terms describing the church. For too long most of us have lived our Christian lives in isolation from other believers. Sure, we attend events with them, but they don’t know us, and we don’t know them. They do not know what our true God-given passions are, and they don’t know the spiritual battles we face. We did not converse with others in the body about the preaching they we heard, the Holy Spirit’s imprint on us during preaching, or our struggles and intentions following Bible preaching. For most of us, we live our Christian lives alone, and God never intended Christianity to look like that. Christianity is not an I thing or a me thing; it is a we thing and an us thing. Every week the whole church lives together in **small groups**. In neighborhoods and towns near our church building, the people of First Calvary Baptist Church meet to **connect** with each other, to **care** for each other, to **converse** with each other about God and His Word, and to **chase** the lost, the fringe, and the wandering. God designed us to live together 24/7/365. To be a part of the First Calvary Baptist Church is to live Christianity **together** in small groups.

What’s happening in our church is what happens in individual lives. Our church is experiencing change, but not just any change. We are experiencing change toward Christlikeness, what the Bible calls sanctification. And we are changing **together**.

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