

Sunday 07/14/24 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: Chapter 6 “The Class Meeting: The Role of the Class Leader” Sermon Series: (Part 6 of 8)

(Slides 1-15 will be listed in order throughout this sermon 😊!)

(Slide 1 – (Class Meeting Book Cover Picture)

(Slide 2 – (Class Meeting – Chapter 6 - “*The Role of the Class Leader*”)

(Slide 3 – (Matthew 18:20)

(Slide 4 – (Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke - Quote)

(Slide 5 – (“Reclaiming Lay Spiritual Leadership” # 1)

(Slide 6 – (“Reclaiming Lay Spiritual Leadership” # 2)

(Slide 7 – (“Class Meeting”/Small Group Leader Testimony – Carl Davis III)

(Slide 8 – (Matthew 18:12-14)

(Slide 9 – (Challenges to Small Groups Video)

(Slide 10 – (1 Peter 1:22)

(Slide 11 – (“Recognizing and Helping Alleviate Fears”)

(Slide 12 – (“Shepherding” # 1)

(Slide 13 – (“Shepherding” # 2)

(Slide 14 – (“Qualities of a Class Leader)

(Slide 15 – (Hebrews 12:11)

So, I was on the phone with my mother Susan this past Tuesday, and I was telling her that I might have one or more testimonies in the next three weeks, here in our Sunday worship about the power and the impact of church small groups. In getting my mother’s permission to share this story, my mother then gave me a short testimony right on the phone. She told me that the church that my stepdad Mike and her attended had different small groups, but in one church that they used to attend they were very active in one small group. I knew that they were in a Bible study, but I must have missed the small group part.

As my mother began to talk about their small group, which she said that her and my stepdad had been in for a long time, she got a little emotional, and her voice even began to shake a little bit. Remember, my mom gave me her blessing to share this story, in part because I never knew about all of this. My mother then said, “Paul if it wasn’t for that small group, I don’t think Mike and I would have been able to get through some of things we were struggling with in our lives.” She then told me that when my stepdad Mike retired from the Air Force that some of the people from the small group drove 120 miles to celebrate his retirement. While I never knew much about this small group, I knew that my mother and stepfather enjoyed their groups, but I never knew what an impact that had on them.

Since I am going to lead a brief training next Sunday 07/21, after church in the Conference Room, about leading a “Class Meeting” or small group, this is why I am preaching this sermon series. This morning then, we are picking up in our sermon series from the book “The Class Meeting,” by Dr. Kevin Watson.

Slide 1 – (Class Meeting Book Cover Picture)

In the book Dr. Watson in a way regrets that early Methodist small groups were called “Class Meetings,” because by today’s standards that title can be a bit confusing. In fact, some might think incorrectly that they are in a school classroom with papers, tests, and homework. Sometimes therefore, some people just call these groups small groups or other names.

What I want us to discuss this morning, in part, is chapter six of the book “The Class Meeting,” called “The Role of the Class Leader.”

(Slide 2 – (Class Meeting – Chapter 6 - “The Role of the Class Leader”))

A Class Leader is the leader of a small group, or the type of small group that we have been learning about. In part, this morning then, I want discuss “The Role the Class Leader,” or in more modern language a small group leader. Then after thinking about and praying about whether you want to be part of a small group, or be a small group leader, you can attend the training next Sunday.

With this said, the quote we are given for our chapter this week is another quote from the first two Methodist Bishops in what is now the United States, Bishop Francis Asbury, and Bishop Thomas Coke. This is the quote:

(Slide 4 – (Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke - Quote))

“The revival of the work of God does perhaps depend as much upon the whole body of leaders, as it does upon the whole body of preachers.”

**- Francis Asbury and Thomas Coke,
1798 Doctrines and Discipline**

So, while pastors are important, and while we serve important functions within the body of Christ, we all are significant in the body of Christ. You all have gifts and

graces, and in the sermon series that I am starting in August, this is what I will be preaching about. If you decide to become part of a small group, you find that your gifts and graces can grow, or that you have gifts and graces that you did not even know you had.

For our discussion this morning, the foundational scripture that I picked for this message, is from the gospel of Matthew 18:20. This is a scripture that many of us probably know by heart. Matthew 18:20 says:

(Slide 3 – (Matthew 18:20))

Matthew 18:20

**²⁰ For where two or three
are gathered in my name,
I am there among them.'**

This is a scripture that myself, and maybe many of you have quoted and or used in many different contexts. In fact, I would say that this is one of the most used scriptures, except for John 3:16, and a few others. I have heard this scripture used in all different ways. One of the biggest ways I have used this is in being with a couple of Christian friends praying in church. Sometimes I have said, “what we are doing right now is church, because Jesus is our midst.” Small groups have this

same truth or concept, but they are also a place where we can grow together. There should be no pressure or feeling that you should ever have to share more than you want to. It should be an environment where we are made to feel comfortable and among friends.

One of my great hopes as the pastor of this church, is to empower everyone in this church that is not the pastor. I will always work hard, but I would love for us all to continue use the gifts that God has given us. We have a church that does this well already, but what are some ways that we can be “Reclaiming Lay Spiritual Leadership” through small groups? Meaning, Let us look together at some of these ideas:

(Slide 5 – (“Reclaiming Lay Spiritual Leadership” # 1))

- “Reclaiming Lay Spiritual Leadership” # 1**
- **Most small groups are not led by a pastor, but by lay people in the church.**
 - **A “Class Meeting” or small group leader is a significant role or position in the church!**
 - **If you are leading a small group in or through this church, this means you are a mature Christian with deep faith in Jesus Christ.**

I would argue that a “Class Meeting” leader or a small group leader is a significant and super important position and role in a church. Some more ways that lay spiritual leadership can be reclaimed through small groups is:

(Slide 6 – (“Reclaiming Lay Spiritual Leadership” # 2))

“Reclaiming Lay Spiritual Leadership” # 2

- **“Today, many people point to the lack of lay leadership as a key and particularly disheartening sign of the decline in the church.”**
- **In the early Methodist Movement, there was no training to be a “Class Leader,” or small group leader.**
- **You generally joined a small group and learned from the leader of that small group to become a small group leader.**

The laity of this church, and the laity yet to come, are through Jesus Christ and the power of the Holy Spirit, the strength of this church. The hope of this whole sermon series that our church Growth and Vision team planted the seeds for, is to grow our faith, strengthen our relationships, and grow our church in many ways. We also have current small group leaders that might be willing to help guide new small groups.

With this said, in the next few weeks, I asked some of our small group leaders to give testimonies about their experiences in small groups. This morning Carl Davis III is going to share with us, and on Sunday 7/28, Jackie Haines is going to share with us. Carl thank you for sharing with us this morning:


(Slide 7 – (“Class Meeting”/Small Group Leader Testimony – Carl Davis III))

Thank you again Carl! To reinforce this message, I want to share with you a reading from the gospel of Matthew 18:12-14. So, if you have your Bibles, or Bible Apps, I invite you to open to Matthew 18:12-14. Matthew 18:12-14 says:

(Slide 8 – (Matthew 18:12-14))

Matthew 18:12-14

¹² What do you think? If a shepherd has a hundred sheep, and one of them has gone astray, does he not leave the ninety-nine on the mountains and go in search of the one that went astray? ¹³ And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he rejoices over it more than over the ninety-nine that never went astray. ¹⁴ So it is not the will of your Father in heaven that one of these little ones should be lost.



A small group leader has a heart and love for people. A small group leader checks on the members of the small group that have drifted, or are not showing up, and has a heart for people that are struggling and suffering.

I have a short video that I want to show you, to hopefully help you to understand some challenges for small groups, but always what small groups can do. Let us watch this video together:

(Slide 9 – (Challenges to Small Groups Video))

I know that sermon series has been challenging for some of us, but my hope is that a year from now we will have new and strong small groups through this church. We are reminded in 1 Peter 1:22 of this:

(Slide 10 – (1 Peter 1:22))

1 Peter 1:22

²² Now that you have purified your souls by your obedience to the truth so that you have genuine mutual love, love one another deeply from the heart.

We are all called in different ways to “watch over each other in love.” Yet, some of us might have some fears about being part of a small group. I know I did the first time that I joined one. Let us look “Recognizing and Helping Alleviate Fears” in being part of a small group. Here are some:

(Slide 11 – (“Recognizing and Helping Alleviate Fears”))

“Recognizing and Helping Alleviate Fears”

- *Why some resist joining a “Class Meeting” or small group:*
 - 1. Many of us are not used to talking about our lives in God.**
 - 2. Some are worried about being “judgmental” or “condemning,” and sometimes we shy away from talking about our faith and our own lives.**
 - **New can be scary! There is no rush for you to get comfortable in a small group!**
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If you are leading a “Class Meeting,” or a small group, then you are in shepherding, guiding, facilitating, and leadership role. Here are some thoughts about being the “shepherding” role as a “Class Meeting,” or small group leader:

(Slide 12 – (“Shepherding” # 1))

“Shepherding” # 1

- *The “Class Meeting” or small group leader is the shepherd of his or her flock.*
- **A “Class Meeting” or small group leader:**
 - 1. Go after the “lost sheep” (People that miss the small group or are struggling).**
 - **A phone call, a card, a text, etc.**
 - 2. Keep the rest of the sheep moving in the right direction.**
 - **Set the tone/Set the example.**

I think being a small group leader is great, and it can be so rewarding. Here are some additional “shepherding” ideas for a “Class Meeting,” or small group leader

(Slide 13 – (“Shepherding” # 2))

“Shepherding” # 2

- **A “Class Meeting” or small group leader:**
 - 3. The “Class Meeting” or small group leader reaches out and connects to group members.**
 - 4. Begins and ends each week in prayer.**
 - 5. Don’t be afraid to begin by telling the group “How your personal walk with God is”**
 - 6. This will encourage the group to think about there “walks with God.”**

So, if you are interested in learning about become a “Class Meeting” or small group leader, come after church to the Conference Room next Sunday 7/21.

A final slide I want to show you all is called the “Qualities of a Class Leader” or small group leader. Here are some of these qualities:

(Slide 14 – (“Qualities of a Class Leader))

“Qualities of a Class Leader”

“Class Meeting” or small group leader:

- 1. A small group leader is honest and vulnerable.**
- 2. A small group leader can share there faith openly.**
- 3. “Watch over one another in love.”**
- 4. Set the tone, but not control or micro-manage.**
- 5. The “Class Meeting” or small group leader is not there as teacher, but as a facilitator.**
- 6. The “Class Meeting” or small group leader does not have to have all the answers.**

Friends, I pray that fruit that will be born out of these small groups will change lives, bring people closer to Christ, and change this church for the better. As I invite the Praise Team to come forward, I would like to share with you one last scripture to reinforce this message. This scripture comes to us from the Apostle Paul’s letter to Hebrews. In Hebrews 12:11 it says:

(Slide 15 – (Hebrews 12:11))

Hebrews 12:11

¹¹ Now, discipline always seems painful rather than pleasant at the time, but later it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it.

I can imagine, as I said that this sermon series has been challenge for some of us, but I pray when we conclude this sermon series in two week that as Hebrews 12:11 says, once again, that it “yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness”. May it be so.

Amen.