

## **Sunday 07/07/24 – Panama Methodist Church**

**Sermon Title: Chapter 5 “The Class Meeting: The Basics: From Start to Finish” Sermon Series: (Part 5 of 8)**

**(Slides 1-16 will be listed in order throughout this sermon 😊!)**

**(Communion Slides 17-19 – For Holy Communion)**

**(Slide 1 – (Class Meeting Book Cover Picture)**

**(Slide 2 – (Class Meeting – Chapter 5 - “The Basics: From Start to Finish”)**

**(Slide 3 – (Acts 2:46-47)**

**(Slide 4 – (Galatians 6:10)**

**(Slide 5 – (Dick Will’s, *Walking to God’s Dream* Quote)**

**(Slide 6 – (“Great Expectation” & The Cultural Shift # 1)**

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**(Slide 17 – (The Apostle’s Creed)**

**(Slide 18 – (Prayer of Confession)**

**(Slide 19 – (The Lord’s Prayer)**

In my life, I have been in a lot of small groups. Some were for school, some were for church, some were at a training, etc. The current and most successful leadership trends point to a collaborate or team model of leadership. This means, while there is likely a head of the team or a “boss” or more than one “boss,” that the team works together. Sometimes teams perform one or more tasks

independently, but sometimes the team comes together in part or the whole to make decisions. Sometimes teams bounce ideas off of each other, ideas are perfected, duties are delegated, and the church, the business, and or the organization moves forward. We often hear inspiring quotes like, “We are stronger together”! Or my favorite, “There is no “I” in team”!

In the same way, the Christian faith historically has been lived out in community. Sure, we have our individual faith in Christ, our individual walks with Christ, and our own personal struggles and successes. If we are not part of a loving and supportive body of Christ however, I think that growing in our faith is much harder. Sometimes in fact, a “solo” faith is one that does not grow nearly as much as it could. There is nothing like a great, supportive, Christ-Centered, and Holy Spirit filled church. Amen?

Of the many church and non-church small groups that I have been a part of, some of the most memorable were the groups in school. So, there I was in sixth grade, when my social studies teacher announced that we were all going to be studying different topics. Not only were we going to be studying different topics, but we were going to be breaking into small groups. We had a week when we were told to complete the project, and I can’t remember to be honest what the project was on. I do remember though that we had to make a poster and present the poster in front of the class. I think there were 4-5 of us in the group. We were given

poster paper, and there were resources in the classroom that we could use, we could go to the library during a free period, and we were all supposed to write a paragraph.

Maybe it is just me though, but every time that I was put into a work group or a project small group, at any level of my schooling, and in general, there was always one or two people that wanted to do nothing. If you make time to meet to work on the project, there always seemed to be one or two people that never even showed up. Part of their work was dependent on the grade that everyone got for the project, as well. So, you know, there is that! In the sixth-grade project that I am talking about, we have one student that didn't want to do anything. So, we figured it out, this student would hold the poster. He didn't need to speak or read anything. He just needed to smile, hold the poster, and maybe point to something here or there. We did get a good grade on the project and the poster too.

This morning, we are beginning the second half of our sermon series on creating small groups, from the book "The Class Meeting," by Dr. Kevin M. Watson. In the first four weeks of this sermon series, we were largely talking about the history the Methodist "Class Meeting," or small groups, where they came from, why they died out, and how they are again present and reviving churches all over this country and the world.

**(Slide 1 – (Class Meeting Book Cover Picture))**

This morning, we are going to be talking, in part, about the fifth chapter of this book called *“The Basics: From Start to Finish.”* Now that we have learned about the history of “The Class Meeting” or small groups, how they functioned, how they transformed lives, and how they are reviving churches today, the real question to ask is how specifically do they work? The good news is that no one has to hold a poster in front of the church explaining the Civil War battle of Gettysburg, the country of Brazil, or anything else. In fact, the small groups that some have told me that are the most uncomfortable are when you are asked at random to form a small group, or to “Talk to two or three neighbors around you about the discussed topic for the next ten-minutes?” Has anyone here ever had that sprung on them on a job training day or somewhere else? “The Class Meeting” or small groups are nothing like these groups.

**(Slide 2 – (Class Meeting – Chapter 5 - “The Basics: From Start to Finish”)**

In setting the stage to discuss some of Chapter 5 *“The Basics: From Start to Finish,”* let me offer a couple of foundational scriptures for this message. If you have your Bibles or Bible App, I invite you to turn with me the book of the Acts of the Apostles 2:46-47.

**(Slide 3 – (Acts 2:46-47)**

In Acts 2:46-47 it says this:

## **Acts 2:46-47**

**<sup>46</sup>Day by day, as they spent much time together in the temple, they broke bread at home and ate their food with glad and generous hearts, <sup>47</sup>praising God and having the goodwill of all the people. And day by day the Lord added to their number those who were being saved.**

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This of course is the story of the early Church in the Book of Acts. In this scripture, this follows the miracle on the Day of Pentecost when the disciples of Jesus spoke in different languages, and the Holy Spirit descended upon them like tongues of fire. The Apostle Peter then gave the first official sermon in the Christian Church, and over 3,000 people came to Christ. This scripture is shortly after this story, and the first Christian Community was living there faith out together.

The early Church in the Book of Acts lived their faith and there life out together, but for some Christians Sunday morning in church, or Sunday morning on television or the internet is the extent of there faith with the church. I guess for some folks this works for them, but it never has worked for me. I love the community of faith, and I need the community of faith in my life. I believe that so many are built and encouraged by each other here every Sunday, but what do we have beyond Sunday, as well. One opportunity for this is small groups.

Another scripture that I want to look at this morning, is the Apostle Paul's letter or Epistle to the church in Galatia, or the Galatians. The specific scripture that I want to look at this morning is Galatians 6:10. Galatians 6:10 says:

**(Slide 4 – (Galatians 6:10))**

**Galatians 6:10**  
**<sup>10</sup> So then, whenever we  
have an opportunity, let us  
work for the good of all,  
and especially for those of  
the family of faith.**

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We have our individual faith, and we also live our faith out through the community of faith. I love Sunday morning worship, but what else can we do to grow our faith in Christ, and our relationships with each other? To this end, starting next Sunday, and every Sunday until the end of July, we will have someone each Sunday in worship talk about their experiences with one or more small groups in church. They will tell how it has grown their faith, and how it has brought them closer to others and the church. Once again, I have extra "Class Meeting" books, if any of you want to read through one, and I am also offering training on Sunday July 21<sup>st</sup> after church in the Conference Room for anyone that wants to be a small group leader.

**(Slide 5 – (Dick Will's, *Walking to God's Dream* Quote))**

Chapter 5 of the book that we are discussing this morning, starts with a quote from a book called “Walking to God’s Dream,” by Dick Wills. Here is the quote:

**“Within six months of beginning our first twenty Wesley Fellowship Groups, I began to sense that God was doing a new thing at Christ Church. There was a movement of the Holy Spirit”.**

**- Dick Wills, *Walking to God’s Dream***

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A “Wesley Fellowship Group” is another name for a “Class Meeting,” or a small group. Dick will said, in his church that in a short time, many people were beginning to grow in faith and the Holy Spirit was moving.

So practically speaking then, how do we do these small groups? The small groups should start with a “Great Expectation,” and sometimes require a cultural shift. Here are some points about “Great Expectation” & The Cultural Shift:

**(Slide 6 – (“Great Expectation” & The Cultural Shift # 1)**

**“Great Expectations” & the Cultural Shift # 1**

- **“If you are a pastor, you can preach and teach about the truth that God’s grace not only pursues us and forgives us, but it also heals us and makes us new”.**
  - **“You can also commit to participate in such a group and actively recruit other people to participate in these groups, and lead them”.**
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How are we growing and nurturing our faith beyond Sunday morning? Here are some more points about “Great Expectation” & The Cultural Shift:

**(Slide 7 – (“Great Expectation” & The Cultural Shift # 2))**

**“Great Expectations” & the Cultural Shift # 2**

- **“If you are a layperson, you can start a group, lead a group, or simply be a faithful participant in one”.**
- **“You can also commit to ask others to join a group with you”.**

With all this said, where do we start if want to lead or be part of a small group?

Further, where would your small group meet? Here at the church? At your home?

At a coffee shop? Can you commit to 1-1.5 hours a week, each week?

In “Starting Somewhere” here are some things to consider in leading or participating in small groups”

**(Slide 8 – (“Starting Somewhere” # 1))**

**“Starting Somewhere” # 1**

- **Be praying about participating in or leading a small group.**
- **The role and function of the leader: (facilitator, not teacher)**
- **The dynamics of small groups: (dealing graciously with people who talk too much, have all the answers, struggle to share at all, etc.)**

Maybe God is calling you to be in a small group, or maybe even God is even calling you to lead a small group. We also need to be aware of the group dynamic, as some people won't want to talk, and some people will want to talk too much.

Here are some more "Starting Somewhere" things to consider in leading or participating in small groups"

**(Slide 9 – ("Starting Somewhere" # 2)**

## **"Starting Somewhere" # 2**

- **Anticipating the development of the group itself (life cycle of small groups)**
- **Examples of groups that are functioning well (I.E. Band of Brothers, Rooted, Weds. Class Meeting) and groups that are not functioning well**
- **Where to go and who to contact with questions or for help (Pastor Paul, Carl Davis III, etc.)**

How long do you think your small group will last? Some last for years and years and are ongoing. Some seem short lived, but I am hoping that we will have small groups that will last for a long time. The good news is that I am here to help with small groups, and so are some of our great small group leaders, like Carl Davis III.

Here is a typical way that a church small group grows and progresses over time, called "Laying the Foundation."

**(Slide 10 – (Laying the Foundation)**

## **“Laying the Foundation”**

- Try explain how the group works and set expectations,
  - **The Life Cycle of a Group:**
    - 1. Birth**
    - 2. Establishing a Routine**
    - 3. Questioning and Refining the Purpose of the Group**
    - 4. Maturity**
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When create a small group as the leader, or a participant in the small group, when you begin, it’s the “birth” of the small group. Then you need to “Establish a Routine,” which should include meeting the same day and time every week for 1-1.5 hours. At some point in most small groups there will be that point where you feel like it is getting stale or repetitive, and at this point usually the Holy Spirit is nudging us to go deeper. Working through this leads to a long-term small group with maturity. If you keep at it, you will be glad that you did!

Here are some “Keys to a successful small group:

**(Slide 11 – (“A Key to a Successful Group: You” # 1)**

### **“A Key to a Successful Group: You” # 1**

- **“The most important ingredient to a successful group is you”!**
  - **“Your honesty with your group is crucial to its success”.**
  - **“Your prayers for your group and individual members will be an enormous asset to the group’s endurance and growth”.**
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Like I have been saying, this whole sermon series, I would encourage you to try out a small group, and to be honest in your small group. I would encourage you to pray for small groups, our church, and potentially a small group that you will lead or be part of.

Here are some more “Keys to a successful small group:

**(Slide 12 – (“A Key to a Successful Group: You” # 2)**

**“A Key to a Successful Group: You” # 2**

- **“Your willingness to be vulnerable and share openly, as well as to make sure you don’t monopolize the conversation, will make the experience more powerful for everyone else”.**
- **“Grow in your love for God and other people- and be willing to do so within the context of a supportive community of faith”.**

As you get to be in a small group, hopefully you will begin to be able to talk and open up about yourself, your faith, and your life. Try to not monopolize the conversation and encourage the quieter to folks in the group to share. The hope is that these small groups will help you grow in your love for God and others and your community of faith.

As a funny example of how not, I repeat not to run a church small group, I have a funny video that I want to show you all. This is actually a two-part video, and I will show the other part in the next few weeks. This video is called “Shallow Small Group: Part 1”. Let’s check it out:

**(Slide 13 – Video (“Shallow Small Group: Part 1”)**

So, it goes without saying, but please don't run or be part of a small group like this!

As I am bringing this message to a close, and I invite the Praise Team to begin to come forward, I want to share a couple more good scriptures to undergird the importance of small groups. If you want to open your Bibles to the Apostle Paul's letter to the Phillipians, or the church at Philippi, let's look at Philippians 2:5-10. Philippians 2:5-10 says:

**(Slide 14 – (Philippians 2:5-10))**

## **Philippians 2:5-10**

**<sup>5</sup> Let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, <sup>6</sup> who, though he was in the form of God, did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited, <sup>7</sup> but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form,**

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**(Slide 15 – (Philippians 2:5-10))**

## **Philippians 2:5-10**

**<sup>8</sup> he humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death—even death on a cross. <sup>9</sup> Therefore God also highly exalted him and gave him the name that is above every name, <sup>10</sup> so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bend, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,**

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The goal of the Christian faith to be become more and more like Jesus, and to then live that out in the world. Small groups have helped countless people, and countless churches to do this. Jesus Christ our Lord, became like one of us, died for us, so that we may be forgiven of our sins. Further, so that us and the world would know him and live and love like him. For Jesus humbled himself, even to the point of death on a cross. May we seek to be more like Jesus.

A final scripture that I want to share with you all is Acts 20:28. It says in the Book of the Acts of the Apostles 20:28 this:

**(Slide 16 – (Acts 20:28))**

## **Acts 20:28**

**<sup>28</sup> Keep watch over yourselves and over all the flock, of which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God that he obtained with the blood of his own Son.**

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Pastors, and all of us are called to look after one another in love. Pastors are called to shepherd and lead the church, but we are all part of this thing called the Church. We are all also called to grow in faith in Christ, and in relationship with each other. I am praying and seeing with excited what God is going in this church. Amen.