

## **Sunday 07/28/24 – Panama Methodist Church**

**Sermon Title: Chapter 8 “The Keys to a Life-Changing Group”**

**Sermon Series: (Part 8 of 8)**

**(Slides 1-14 will be listed in order throughout this sermon 😊!)**

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

**(Slide 2 – Class Meeting – Chapter 8 - “The Keys to a Life-Changing Group?”)**

**(Slide 3 – (Romans 12:10)**

**(Slide 4 – (Peter Cartwright Quote)**

**(Slide 5 – (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12)**

**(Slide 6 – (“Why ‘Class Meeting’ or Small Groups?”)**

**(Slide 7 – (“A Group That God Can Use to Bring Life Change”)**

**(Slide 8 – (“Back to the Basics”)**

**(Slide 9 – (1 Corinthians 12:25-27)**

**(Slide 10 – (“Cultivating Self-Awareness”)**

**(Slide 11 – (Video - Leadership Video Slide 11)**

**(Slide 12 – (“Class Meeting”/Small Group Leader – Testimony**

**Jackie Haines)**

**(Slide 13 – (“Final Thoughts”)**

**(Slide 14 – (Proverbs 27:17)**

For the past seven weeks, we have discussed the book “The Class Meeting” by Dr. Kevin Watson. This book and this preaching series was designed to teach us or to reteach us about the importance of “Class Meetings” or small groups.

Specifically, we have been talking about “The Class Meeting” which is a small group designed to grow our faith in Christ and strengthen our relationships with each other. I also hope that this preaching series has shown us the importance of living our Christian faith all week, as for many of us Sunday morning is not enough for us. How do we connect with, pray with, and interact with each other

throughout the week? How are we growing in our faith? Do we feel close to God or far away?

You know to be honest, there were times in my life that I faithfully went to church every Sunday, but there were times that I did not grow in faith. There were times that I knew who Jesus was mentally, but I do not think that my faith grew that much. I believed that good people go to church, and I had friends at church. When my faith in Christ grew, and as it continues to grow, I am learning more and more that our faith is something that lives inside of us, and something that goes with us wherever we go. How does our faith grow, and how does our faith prosper? I ask these questions, because if our faith gets stagnant, then what do we do?

I think the answer for many people is they stop going to church. Why do they stop going to church? Well for some they might not be hearing that Jesus died for their sins, or that through Christ they are offered forgiveness, salvation, and eternity only through him. For some, they do not feel the movement of the Holy Spirit, and for some they feel like they are not growing in their faith. I have even met Christians that joined the various churches that I have pastored that said to me things like, “Pastor Paul, I would love to join this church, but I do not want to join a church that is only a Sunday morning church. I need more than just Sunday morning.”

The “Class Meetings” or small groups that we are discussing might not be for everyone, but for some they will be a spiritual anchor and a powerful force for growth in our Christian faith. So, once again today we will be completing this eight-month sermon series on the “Class Meeting.” These groups can transform us, grow our faith, and can help us to disciple others in Christ. So today once again, we finish our series on the book “The Class Meeting.”

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

Specifically, the last chapter of the book for this preaching series is called “The Keys to a Life-Changing Group?” I really resonated with the title of this chapter because keys open things. What will open us up to deeper faith in Christ, and closer connections to each other? Are we willing to dive deeper?

**(Slide 2 – Class Meeting – Chapter 8 - “The Keys to a Life-Changing Group?”)**

As I often do, I prayed that for this sermon this morning that I would think about something that would connect to the concept of keys and opening up things. For some reason I thought of the first car that I ever owned when I was sixteen years. I remember that I got my first job when I was eleven years old as a paper boy. I did that job for five years, along with starting a snow shoveling business. At sixteen though, I was ready to get an hourly job, so I got a job at my local Burger King restaurant. Around this time, I also took my written test to get my learners

permit, and I was so excited to be on my way to being able to drive, and one day have my own car!


Back in 1998 when I was sixteen, I was making, wait for it, a whopping \$5.25 an hour, and I was making burgers, so it was not all bad. In working part-time about 20-28 hours a week, it took a long time to save up money. Especially since if I worked 20-hours a week I would gross \$105 dollars. Well, I did it! I saved up \$600 dollars, as I used to ride my Huffy bike about 1-1.5 miles each way from work, so getting a car sounded great! So, I began looking, and I realized that even in 1998 you could not buy much for \$600. I definitely could not afford car payments, and I wanted something fuel efficient that would last. My parents still laugh at this to this day, as most young guys want a big pickup truck, but I did not have that kind of money

The day finally came when I bought my 1990 white Hyundai Accel, which is the predecessor to the Hyundai Accent. It was a little box of a car, but it felt so cool to drive to work and high school in my own car. I remember that the car was \$1,100 dollars, and of course I did not have enough money, but my mom and my stepdad said that since I worked so hard that they would put in the other \$500 for me to buy the car. Those car keys, once I got my driver's license, were amazing! Small groups can be "spiritual keys" that can change and unlock our spiritual lives and bring us closer to each other.

The foundational scripture that I am using for this message this morning comes from Romans 12:10. If you want to open your Bibles or your Bible apps to Romans 12:10, let us hear what God's word has to tell us this morning. Romans 12:10 says:

**(Slide 3 – (Romans 12:10))**

**Romans 12:10**  
**<sup>10</sup> love one another**  
**with mutual affection;**  
**outdo one another in**  
**showing honor.**



While we are called to repent of our sins and turn to Jesus Christ, we are called to love each other with mutual affection, and we are called to outdo one another in showing each other honor.

The last chapter quote we are given for this morning, once again comes from the famous Methodist Pastor and Evangelist Peter Cartwright. This quote is about “Class Meetings” or small groups, and says:

**(Slide 4 – (Peter Cartwright Quote))**

**“In these class-meetings many seekers of religion have found them the spiritual birth-place of their souls into the heavenly family, and their dead souls made alive to God.”**

**- Peter Cartwright**

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While I led a “Class Leader” or leader training for “Class Meetings” or small group leaders last Sunday after church, feel free to chat with me if you want more information about being part of or leading a small group.


As we are wrapping up this sermon series, another good scripture about coming together with each other through our faith, comes to us from the Old Testament or Hebrew Bible book of Ecclesiastes. If your Bible or Bible apps, I would invite you to open to the Old Testament Book of Ecclesiastes. In the book of Ecclesiastes, we find in 4:9-12, these words:

**(Slide 5 – (Ecclesiastes 4:9-12))**

# **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**

## ***“The Value of a Friend”***

**<sup>9</sup>Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil. <sup>10</sup>For if they fall, one will lift up the other; but woe to one who is alone and falls and does not have another to help. <sup>11</sup>Again, if two lie together, they keep warm; but how can one keep warm alone? <sup>12</sup>And though one might prevail against another, two will withstand one. A threefold cord is not quickly broken.**



Growing in our faith in God, through Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit is great, but growing in faith and love together is even more powerful. Our faith grows stronger not only individually, but together, as well.

In wrapping up this eight-week sermon series on small groups then, what are some final reasons to consider joining or leading a “Class Meeting” or small group? Let us look at a couple of reasons:

**(Slide 6 – (“Why ‘Class Meeting’ or Small Groups?”))**

## **“Why ‘Class Meetings’ or Small Groups?”**

- **To strengthen your life in Christ, to help you be delivered from temptation, and to help those who are seeking Jesus to find new life in him.**
- **Peter Cartwright, like John Wesley, was convinced that a relationship with Jesus was best experienced within the context of community, a “heavenly family.”**

What a joy, and what a blessing this church is, and what a blessing it is that we get to live out our faith together. Beyond this though, why can a small group be “A Group That God Can Use to Bring Life Change.” Let us take a look together:

**(Slide 7 – (“A Group That God Can Use to Bring Life Change”))**

### **“A Group That God Can Use to Bring Life Change”**

- **Not all small groups are equal-some are better than others.**
- **Small groups that focus on information (curriculum-driven studies) tend to draw people’s attention away from who they are in Christ and are not as successful in helping people become more like Christ.**

In some ways, participating in or being in “Class Meetings” or small groups is getting “Back to the Basics” of not only the early Methodist Movement, but early Christianity itself. How do “Class Meetings” or small groups help us get back to the basics. Let us look together:

**(Slide 8 – (“Back to the Basics”))**

## **“Back to the Basics”**

- **Strive for basic organization and planning.**
- **A life-changing group is made up of members who plan for the group to succeed by agreeing on:**
  - 1. A regular time and place to meet.**
  - 2. Intentionally carving out space for the group in your lives.**
  - 3. Committing to attend the group consistently.**

Another scripture that brings home what I have been talking about in this sermon series, is from 1 Corinthians 12:25-27. If you can open your Bibles or Bible apps to the Apostle Paul’s first letter to the church in Corinth, or the Corinthians, it says in 12:25-27 this:

**(Slide 9 – (1 Corinthians 12:25-27))**

# **1 Corinthians 12:25-27**

**<sup>25</sup> that there may be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another. <sup>26</sup> If one member suffers, all suffer together with it; if one member is honored, all rejoice together with it. <sup>27</sup> Now you are the body of Christ and individually members of it.**

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We serve one Triune God, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, and we are united through the cross of Christ. We stand on the authority of the Bible, the saving grace found only in Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit.

One of the things that I have learned to do over time, training, and learning, is to try to “Cultivate Self-Awareness.” Here are some tips for “Cultivating Self-Awareness” in small groups, and in general:

**(Slide 10 – (“Cultivating Self-Awareness”))**

# **“Cultivating Self-Awareness”**

- **Active listening, Focusing, and trying not to Interrupt others.**
  - **Mutual respect for everyone.**
  - **Don’t dominate the conversation or be detached from the conversation.**
  - **Try to be as open as you can.**
  - **“What is God doing in your life?”**
  - **Be open to “New Life” and growth in Christ.**
  - **Take up our cross and take our faith very seriously!**
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If you make mistakes with any of this, do not feel bad. We will all make mistakes, and we are all learning and growing together! The goal is to lead and love well.

As an example of this, a movie that I love is called “We Were Soldiers” starring actor Mel Gibson. Actor Mel Gibson portrays Colonel Hal Moore, and the movie chronicles the first battle in the country of Vietnam, between American and Vietnamese forces in the Vietnam War. In this short one-minute video clip from this movie, I want to show you two very distinct types of leadership. In this video clip, actor Mel Gibson, portraying an Army Major and soon to be Colonel Hal Moore, is watching his junior officers get their enlisted men ready to go into battle in Vietnam. These junior officers are charged with preparing their soldiers, bringing them together, and getting them ready for combat on foreign soil, in Vietnam.

**(Slide 11 – (Video - Leadership Video Slide 11))**

So, there are good and bad ways to lead a “Class Meeting” or a small group. A great leader, and a friend of mine, Jackie Haines, has agreed to give her testimony this morning about leading and participating in “Class Meetings” or small groups. Jackie, thank you for your willingness to share a testimony with us this morning.

**(Slide 12 – (“Class Meeting”/Small Group Leader – Testimony Jackie Haines)**

In bringing this sermon series on the “Class Meeting” or small groups to a close, and in inviting the praise team forward, I have a few “Final Thoughts” to help and encourage us. Here are these “Final Thoughts”:

**(Slide 13 – (“Final Thoughts”)**

## **“Final Thoughts”**

- “Look over one another in love.”**
- Expect the Holy Spirit to move!**
- May we all grow closer to our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ!**

So as this sermon series ends, be praying about and thinking about being part of, or leading a small group.

A final, and very fitting scripture to bring this sermon series to a close comes to us from the Book of Proverbs, or the “Book of Wisdom,” from 27:17. This is what it Proverbs 27:17 says:

**(Slide 14 – (Proverbs 27:17))**

# **Proverbs 27:17**

## **<sup>17</sup> Iron sharpens iron, and one person sharpens the wits of another.**

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May we continue to grow in faith together, may we continue to grow and sharpen each other in our faiths, as “Iron sharpens iron.” May the church of Jesus Christ grow and flourish, knowing that the real growth and increase starts in us. Amen.