Sunday 06/16/24 – Panama Methodist Church

Sermon Title: Chapter 2 "The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival" Sermon Series: (Part 2 of 8)

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

(Slide 1 – (Funny Father's Day Video)
(Slide 2 – (Class Meeting Picture)
(Slide 3 – Chapter 2 - "The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival")
(Slide 4 – John Wesley Quote)
(Slide 5 – Justification By Faith)
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(Slide 7 – George Whitefield Picture)
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(Slide 9 – Whitefield/Wesley Question)
(Slide 10 – 1 Thessalonians 5:11)
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So, even though we are continuing to walk through our eight-week sermon series, in part, on the book called "The Class Meeting," today of course is also Father's Day. This special day every year that we celebrate the men in our lives. Dad's, grandparents, for some stepdads, and other male role models. Today we honor all the men both past and present, the sacrifices they make or made, what they have done for us, and what they continue to do for us. We are who we are in part because of what they have and continue to do for us.

Some of us though had some “no nonsense” dads or grandpas or maybe we still do. Anyone here have or had a dad or a grandpa that was or is “no nonsense”. I mean a dad, a grandpa, a stepdad, or a male role model that ran a “tight ship” and had strict rules. Imagine though what dads, grandpas, and positive male models would say though if they had no rules? We you are in luck, I will show you such a dad. This is a Father’s Day video that shows a dad saying nothing any reasonable dad would ever actually say.

(Slide 1 – Funny Father’s Day Video)

If my dad, my stepdad, or my grandfather’s said most of what was in this video, I think I would be stunned, and have no response. I am also glad that I really never heard any of those things. So, let’s honor dads, grandfathers, and all the men in our lives that have and continue to do so much for us!

With this said, we are continuing to work through, in part, the book “The Class Meeting” by Kevin M. Watson.

(Slide 2 – Class Meeting Picture)

This book talks about small groups. Last week I talked in part about three different types of small groups that many people tend to participate in. These types of small groups are “Affinity Groups,” that are more social. “Information-Driven Groups” that are more focused on learning, head knowledge, and personal growth. Both “Affinity Groups” and “Information-Driven Groups” can have elements of

spiritual growth, but “Transformation-Driven Groups” are focused on spiritual and faith growth. Small groups specially created to help us grow in our walks with Christ, and with each other. I am hoping, like I said last week, that this sermon series will help us in the creation of small groups in this church, focused on faith growth and relationship growth. A weekly group that meets, and focuses on growing our faith, deepening our connection to Christ, and our connections to each other. For a church to grow big, it must grow small, and small groups are a great way to accomplish this!

This morning, I want to talk about the second of eight chapters in the book “The Class Meeting” by Kevin M. Watson. I ordered some additional books, should any of us want to read one of the books to help with the formation of a new small group. With this said, the second chapter of this book is called “The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival”.

(Slide 3 – Chapter 2 - “The Class Meeting: The Heart of the Methodist Revival”)

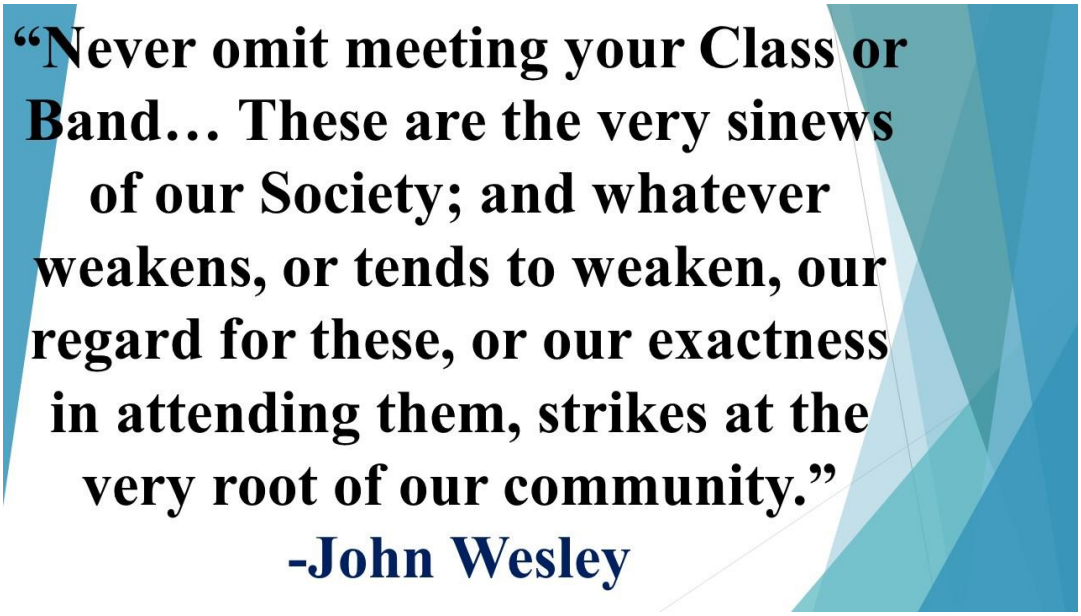
In the formative days of the Methodist Movement, that officially started in what is now the United States in 1784, every new member of the Methodist-Episcopal Church was required to be part of a weekly “Class Meeting” or small group. The reason for this was that these small groups keep the church folks interconnected, spiritually growing, and growing closer to each other. Many

churches all over the country and the world to this day thrive because of small groups.

I have seen small groups that meet in coffee shops, homes, apartments, churches, etc. I remember at the last church that I was serving, the AA or Alcoholics Anonymous meeting and the NA or Narcotics Anonymous meetings in the church were impressive. These groups of course are very different from class meetings or Methodist small groups, but they did provide support, accountability, and help to for the people involved to stay on a good track.

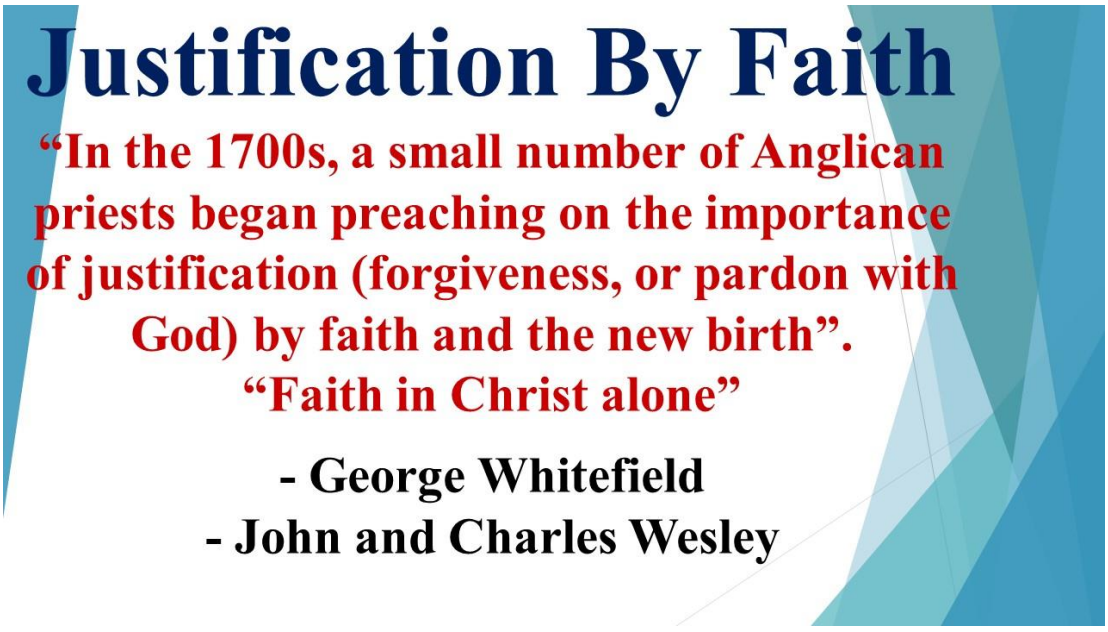
I remember saying to a couple of AA and NA groups, that if all churches had groups of people that got together to love and encourage each other like this, that every church in America would be significantly stronger than it is right now. Small groups can and will change us, can and will change this church, and can change the community and the world. What did the founder of Methodist Movement say about "Class Meetings," and "Band Meetings?"

(Slide 4 – John Wesley Quote)



So once again, I am hoping that through this preaching series that we learn more about how we can strengthen our faith and grow closer to each other.

(Slide 5 – Justification By Faith)

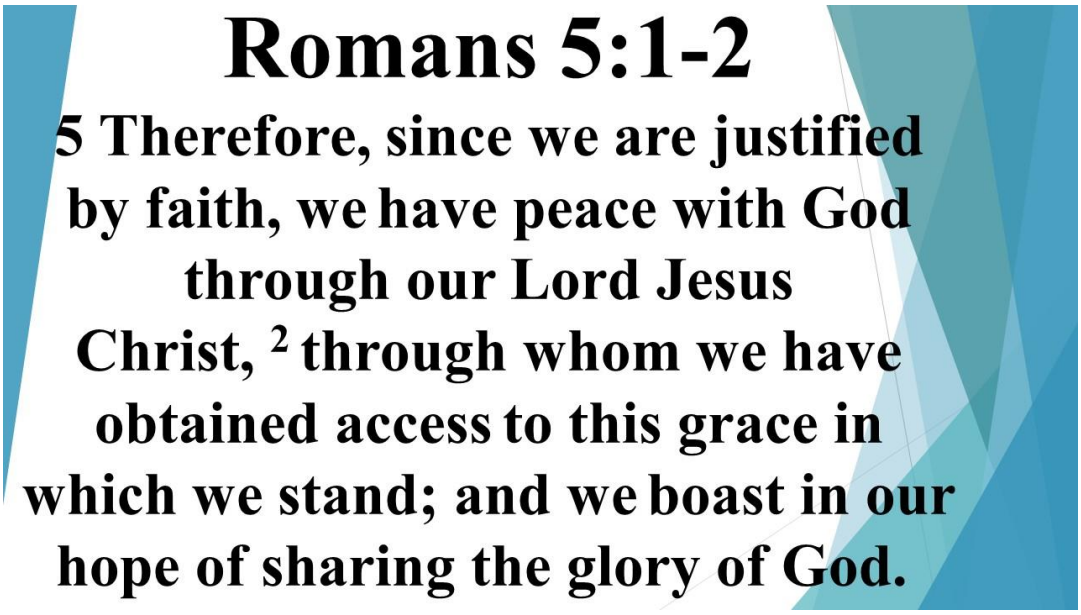


In getting into the meat of this the second of eight chapters of the book “The Class Meeting” by Kevin M. Watson, a big topic discussed is “Justification by

Faith." I believe, as I am sure you all do that faith in Jesus Christ is enough for salvation, eternity, to forgiveness. There is nothing that we can do to earn it, we simply turn to Christ, repent of our sins, believe in and on him, and through the Holy Spirit we become a new creation.

As I mentioned last Sunday, the ministry of Rev. Billy Graham was largely centered on the doctrine of "Justification by Faith." Come forward to altar, give your life to Christ, and you will be offered forgiveness, salvation, and grace. The doctrine of "Justification by Faith" was not new in the 1700's either, as the rally cry of the great German Reformer Martin Luther was the doctrine of "Justification by Faith," back in the 1500's. Faith is enough, and this idea of the doctrine of "Justification by Faith" can be seen through scriptures, like Romans 5:1-2 that says:

(Slide 6 – Romans 5:1-2)



As I said last Sunday though, what happens after we come to Christ? Is it possible for our faith to weaken or not burn as bright over time? This reminds me of a short story called "The Lonely Ember." This story by Dr. John MacArthur, goes like this:

A member of a certain church, who previously had been attending services regularly, stopped going. After a few weeks, the pastor decided to visit him. It was a chilly evening. The pastor found the man at home alone, sitting before a blazing fire. Guessing the reason for his pastor's visit, the man welcomed him, led him to a big chair near the fireplace and waited. The pastor made himself comfortable but said nothing. In the grave silence, he contemplated the play of the flames around the burning logs. After some minutes, the pastor took the fire tongs, carefully picked up a brightly burning ember and placed it to one side of the hearth all alone. Then he sat back in his chair, still silent. The host watched all this in quiet fascination. As the one lone ember's flame diminished, there was a momentary glow and then its fire was no more. Soon it was cold and "dead as a doornail." Not a word had been spoken since the initial greeting. Just before the pastor was ready to leave, he picked up the cold, dead ember and placed it back in the middle of the fire. Immediately it began to glow once more with the light and warmth of the burning coals around it. As the pastor reached the door to leave, his host said, "Thank you so much for your visit and especially for the fiery sermon. I shall be back in church next Sunday" (https://www.servantsanglican.org/2017/06/23/the-lonely-ember/).

What happens my dear friends if our conversion experience, our altar call experience, begins to grow dim? I mean when we come to Christ, it is hard to stay "on the mountain top" forever isn't it? For most of us our faith in Christ is sometimes burning bright, and for some, it is dimmer at other times. Like a burning ember in a fire, if we are not

connected to the source of the fire, it can affect our faith. It can affect our fire for Christ, and it can even affect our joy.

So, while I think going to church on Sunday to be spiritually fed, to love each other, and to be spiritually fed by each other in church is important, for many of us Sunday isn't enough. Methodist started small groups in Bristol, England to eventually address this "not enough" reality. The first Methodist small group though, was created to try to figure out how to pay off a building. So, with that said, I think I have the attention of our church trustees! This first small group in 1742 quickly became more. People cared for each other, looked after each other, and loved each other. The weekly small group is an opportunity to check in each week, to grow, to love, and to grow closer to Christ. The next level of a "class meeting" is a "Band Meeting," and I would personally love to be part of one of those at some point. A "Band Meeting" is a small group that is even more focused and has even more accountability for faith growth and personal holiness.

With this said, getting back to the idea of "Justification by Faith," George Whitefield was arguably the best and most talented preacher in the 1700's. In fact, "The First Great Awakening" that went through the American Colonies from 1739-1740 brought countless people to Christ. Further, the face of this "This

First Great Awakening" in North America was not John Wesley, but George Whitefield.

(Slide 7 – George Whitefield Picture)

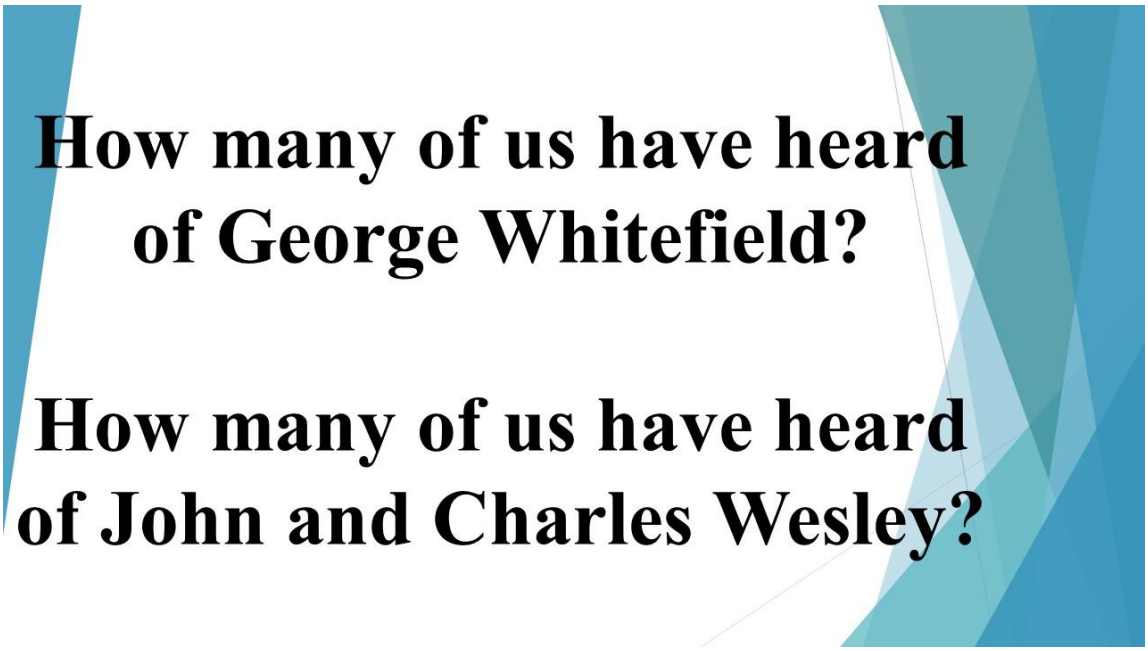
This man, Rev. George Whitefield is attributed to bringing countless people to Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Even almost three-hundred years ago, tens of thousands of people came to hear George Whitefield preach and heard about "Justification by Faith" in Christ.

Another significant Christian pastor and leader of this era in the 1700's was Rev. John Wesley, the founder of the Methodist Movement, which Panama Methodist Church all these years later is part of.

(Slide 8 – John Wesley Picture)

I am an ordained Global Methodist Church elder. As a Methodist, I am deeply rooted in Wesleyan or Methodist teachings and theology. John Wesley was not as a good of preacher as George Whitefield, and he even admitted this. Here is my question about George Whitefield and John Wesley, however:

(Slide 9 – Whitefield/Wesley Question)



Most scholars would say that in the 1700's that God used Rev. George Whitefield to lead significantly more people to Christ than John Wesley. Yet, I know a ton of people who have heard the name John Wesley, but very few that have heard the name Rev. George Whitefield? How many of us here have heard of Rev. George Whitefield? More people know the name Wesley than Whitefield. Neither Wesley or Whitefield were worried about people remembering their names, as I didn't mean this in a competitive way, but how could a less effective preacher be so much more known than a better and a more effective preacher like Whitefield?

The bigger answer to this is small groups, or "The Class Meeting." What grew Methodist wasn't just good preaching, it was small groups, us living our faith together, and being united as the body of Christ. Towards the end of Whitefield's

life, he said that the movement he started was like a “rope of sand.” By this Whitefield meant that even though the Holy Spirit worked through him to bring countless people to Christ, Whitefield had no post conversion plan for the people he preached to. What happened after they came to Christ? What happened after the altar call? I believe that this is an area that many churches struggle with.

So, my point brothers and sister is this, you could have Rev. Billy Graham preaching amazing sermons here every Sunday, but our togetherness and growth in faith, comes not just from our conversion to Christ, but also from our growth in Christ. We need to continue to go from spiritual milk to solid spiritual food. Strong and growing churches, often have a hard working, gifted, and effective pastor, but the connection between the pastor and an active congregation, and a congregation growing in faith is how a church really grows.

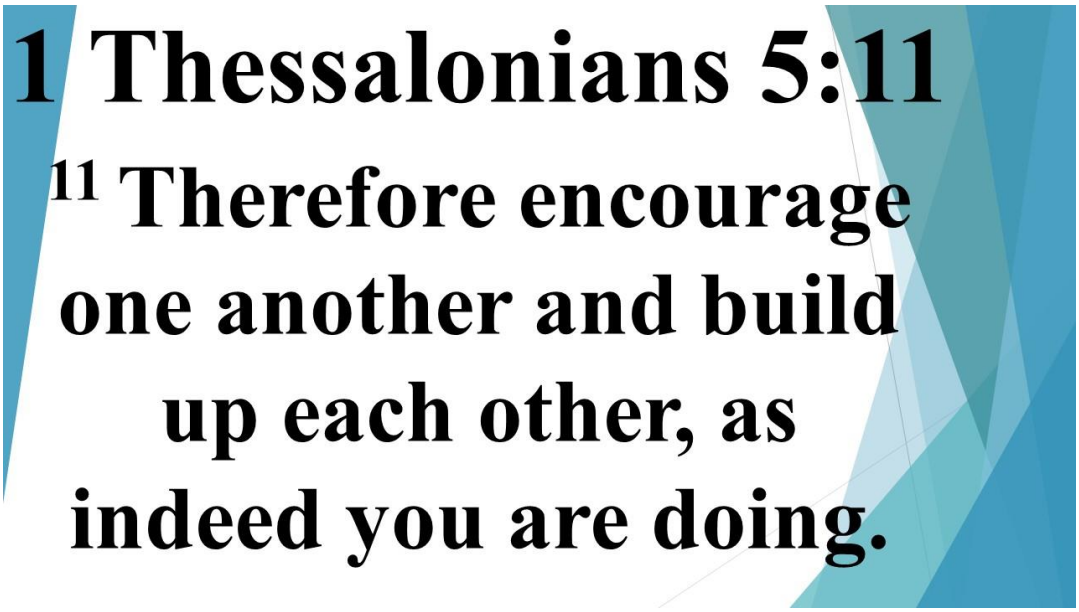
What’s my evidence of this, Rev. George Whitefield, the “Bill Graham” of the 1700’s brought far more people to Christ through the power of the Holy Spirit, that John Wesley did, but once again Whitefield had no plan post conversion. This is why Whitefield said that the movement that he started was like “a rope of sand,” and also why the Methodist Movement grew like wildfire. As we grow in faith, the church will also grow in every conceivable positive metric of growth.

This means that the pastor of the church is the missional head of the church, and a big part of my role is to train and equip leaders, so that they can then train

and equip other leaders. I'm excited for the day that he have a candidate for ministry from Panama Methodist Church once again, for the ways that God will continue to grow us all. I say all of this, because some churches that I have pastored seemed to think that a good and effective pastor was the totality of church strength and growth. A strong and gifted pastor can through the power of the Holy Spirit grow a church, but only so far. Whitefield learned this lesson, and Wesley, invested heavily in the people and in leaders. This is why in 2024 we have various expressions of Methodism and no expressions "Whitefieldism".

I also know that what I have presented this morning and last Sunday might seem like a lot, and it is. Believe me though that these small groups will change our lives, grow our faith in Christ, and will spur other great ministries, as well. We are reminded in 1 Thessalonians 5:11 this:

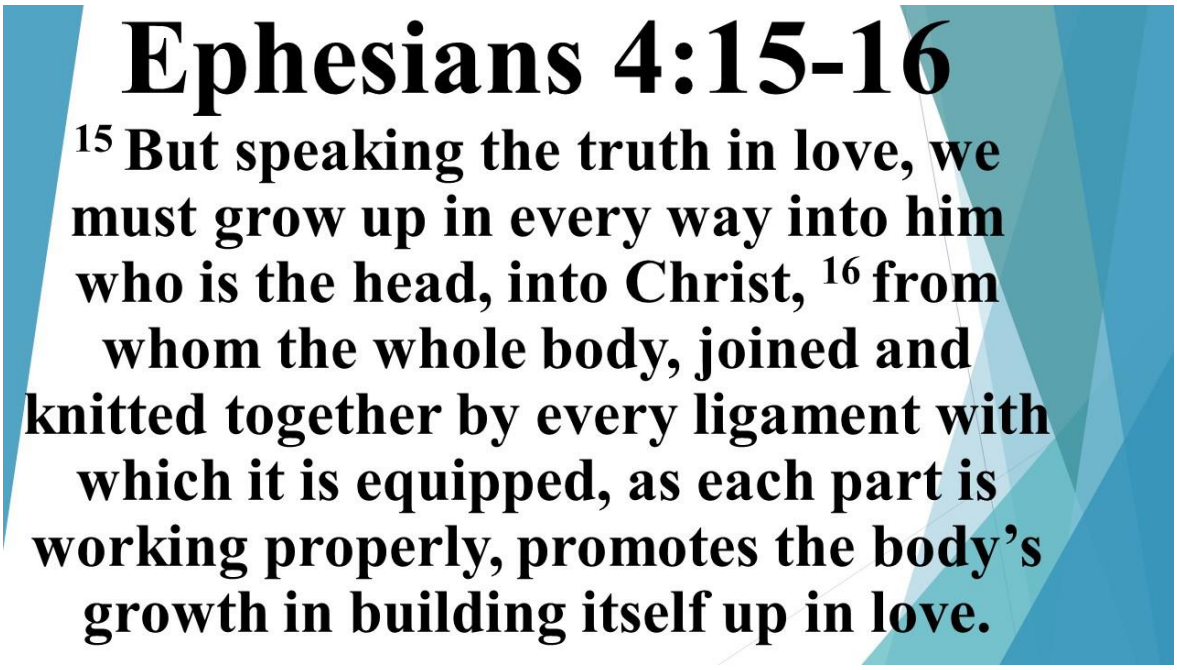
(Slide 10 – 1 Thessalonians 5:11)



The pastor of the church serves in many vital roles, but you are all gifted. You all have various gifts and graces that you are using to serve the Kingdom of God, and gifts that you might not even know that you have. In my next sermon series in August, I will be preaching on "The Parts of the Body of Christ," and this will aide us in our spiritual and general growth. This will all help, including the "Class Meetings," or small groups.

The Apostle Paul tells us in Ephesians 4:15-16, the following:

(Slide 11 – Ephesians 4:15-16)

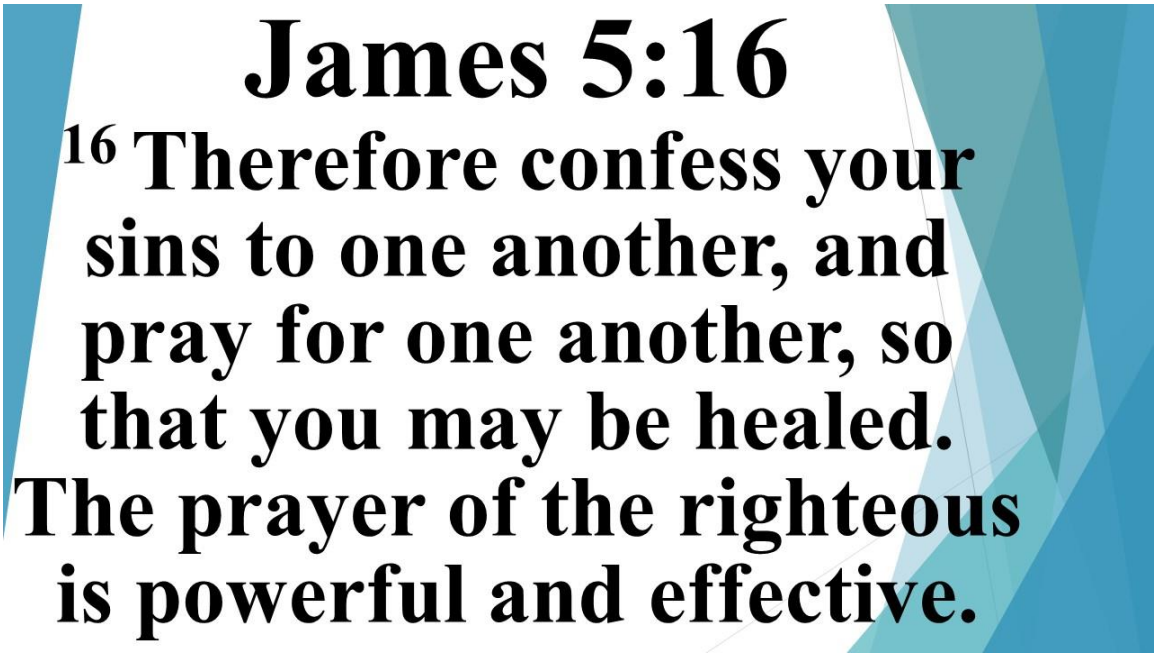


Like all of us, I am not a finished product, as I am continuing grow and to be sanctified in God's grace, through Jesus Christ, and the power of the Holy Spirit. We live in a culture these days that seems to no longer have any universal truths, but for two-thousand years the vast majority of Christians have our universal and

unchanging truth is Jesus Christ. The closer we grow to him through the power of the Holy Spirit, the stronger our faith and our church will be.

The last scripture I want to share this morning is James 5:16 that says:

(Slide 12 – James 5:16)



Brothers and sisters, as we move forward together both individually, and as a church, the strength, the growth, and vitality of this church starts with the increase and the health of our own faith. Creating flexible opportunities to grow in our faith and closer to each other, can change us all for the better!

In Closing, as the Praise Team makes their way forward, I wanted to show one more short Father's Day video on this Father's Day. This one is more endearing, and talks more about the significance of fathers, and all those men that have made such a difference in our lives. After this video, I then want to show you

a quick picture of a couple of statues of the sacrifice that so many fathers make for their children, their families, and their communities.

(Slide 13 – Father's Day Video – Sincere)

Here is the picture of the statue of the father and son. You can see the sacrifice fathers make, in this case, for their children.

(Slide 14 – Father and Child Statue)

So, as we go forward with learning about "class meetings" or small groups, and as we honor fathers and the good men that have been in our lives, may we all grow closer to each other, and closer to Jesus Christ, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Amen.