

“PARTY PLANNING (#3): KEEPIN’ THE PARTY GOIN’”

(Luke 6:12-16; Hebrews 10:24-25)

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**PROPS NEEDED: (#1) Title/Intro from “Gilligan’s Island”; (#2) “Party CleanUp” Skit;  
and (#3) Christian Small Group Commitment Brochure**

[East Cobb U.M.C.; 9-24-08]

-I-

1. **[Trad. Service ONLY:]** Read Text: Luke 6:12-16; Hebrews 10:24-25 and Pray.

2. **[WATCH VIDEO CLIP: Title/Intro from “Gilligan’s Island”** (Time: 1:02)]

A—For the past two weeks, we’ve been sharing in a sermon series called “Party Planning” in which we’ve been relating the biblical practice of “Evangelism” to the planning of a great party (called salvation).

B—Now, we’ve learned that though this party is thrown by *GOD*, nevertheless *WE* play a significant role...

1—First, in helping *others* to find and experience this party (something called “Inviting Evangelism”).

2—Then, last week Pastor Jim talked to about the importance of helping folks to feel welcome / “at home” at God’s party (something called “Hospitality Evangelism”).

C—Today I want us to focus on the third and final dimension of our role at God’s party: ...something I call “Incorporating Evangelism”, which refers to how you and I can help ourselves and others get “connected” through authentic Christian relationships. <sup>1</sup>

3. Now, I want to set the stage for this by first calling attention to the fact that the New Testament *presupposes* that you and I are going to live out our Christian life in relationship with other people. <sup>2</sup>

A—I know that there are some people today who say, “*But Pastor, I don’t need the church, or anyone else to be a good Christian. Me and Jesus are really tight, and he’s all I need. After all, I can worship God anywhere... even on the 18<sup>th</sup> hole of the golf course!*”

1—Now, I acknowledge that there *are* many people who call on the name of God on the golf course.

2—But I tend to think most often it’s *not* because they’re worshipping. :-)

B—Think about this: if the kingdom of God is a *party*, then you can’t very well have a party all by yourself, can you? No. It takes others.

C—And so, God knew that for us to be able to become fully mature people of faith, we’d need something more than just a private, personal relationship with Jesus Christ – that’s a good first step, but that’s not *all* that we’d need.

C–Instead, God knew that we’d need *Christian Fellowship* – authentic relationships with other people of faith – in order to (as today’s title says) “*Keep the Party Goin’*” of God’s salvation. And that’s why God gave us **SMALL GROUPS** in His Church.<sup>3</sup>

4. Today’s two scriptures actually illustrates this very well:

A–Luke 6 tells us the story of Jesus up on a mountain praying all night (by himself!). But then in Verse 13 it says that “*When he came down, he summoned his disciples; from them he selected twelve he designated as apostles...*”, and then it goes on to name those twelve.

1–The point to notice here is that right at the beginning of Jesus’ public ministry, he doesn’t go out and try to do it alone or by himself.

2–Instead, he calls together a group of twelve individuals (e.g., the first Christian small group) to help him in his ministry journey.

3–So my question is: If Jesus needed a small group to carry out HIS calling, then why do we often presume today that we can do *without* one to carry out OURS?

B–Evidently, this very thing was happening in our second scripture reading from Hebrews 10:24-25: The NRSV says...“*Let us consider how to provoke one another to love and good deeds, not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day [of Christ] approaching.*”

1–From this we can guess that there were some early Christians who thought (like we often do today) that they didn’t *need* the corporate worship or small group experiences provided by the church – that they could be “good Christians” all by themselves.

2–And so Paul writes “*Do NOT neglect meeting together as is the habit of some...*” – reminding them (& us) of the importance of “meeting together” in Christian fellowship

5. And then Paul goes on to not only list two *benefits* of being in Christian small groups, but also of the 2 primary *purposes* of Christian small groups, as well: that through them, we can “*encourage one another*” and can “*provoke one another to love and good deeds....*” = (#1) **Encouragement** (or Support/Care);and (#2) **Loving Challenge** to be more than we are.<sup>4</sup>

A–Now, it’s not that it’s impossible to do these two things all by ourselves, but the reality is that it’s just not very likely.

1–For example, when I’m down about something, very *rarely* am I able to get out of my bad mood by myself – I usually *enjoy* my “pity parties” (the only party you can have alone!) And it takes *outside* encouragement to get me out of it!

2–And when I’m lazy about something that I need to be doing (or perhaps apathetic about something I need to *stop* doing), very *rarely* do I kick myself to either get going or stop my bad habits – instead, it takes someone *outside* to “*provoke/challenge*” me to do the right thing(s).

B–Let’s watch an example of how this works...

1–[**“PARTY CLEAN-UP” SKIT** (Time: 2:30) *Party trash/leftovers scattered throughout front of church. One person tries to clean up mess alone= difficult to do; But when 3-4 others help, the job gets done much faster and more efficiently*]

2–Did you catch the point here? ...it’s easier to clean up a mess when you have help than if you try to do it *alone*!

3–Friends, the “mess” of our lives is easier to “clean up” when we have the help of Christian brothers and sisters in a small group who’ll both (#1) *encourage/support* us when we’re having tough times, and who’ll also (#2) lovingly *challenge* and “*provoke*” us to become even better than we are.

C–This is the value / benefit of Christian relationships that we find in small groups at church.

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6. You may say, “*But Pastor, I know some of the folks at this church, and honestly they’re a bit strange for me. I don’t have too much in common with them, so I don’t think I could learn anything from them.*”

A–Well, *that* thought brings us to “Gilligan’s Island” (you didn’t think I’d ever get there, did you?)

1–You know, from 1964-66 (and in reruns ever since), this popular TV show shared the amazing story of how a group of seven very different people helped one another survive after being shipwrecked on a deserted Pacific island.

2–And though they didn’t like one another to begin with, by the time they were rescued, they’d helped each other through so many situations, and grown to care for each other so deeply, that they wanted to stay together for the rest of their lives.

B–Well, I want to suggest that “Gilligan’s Island” is really a picture of how small groups can work in the church – of how a whole group of people can be thrown together in life’s stormy situations who really have little or nothing in common with each other... *except* that they’re all stranded and struggling to work out their salvation.<sup>5</sup>

1–Consider the fact that through their experiences together, the Howells learn that it really isn’t all about money; Ginger learns that it’s not about looks; the Skipper learns how to be a better leader; the Professor learns that not everything has to be explained scientifically; and they *all* learn from the “*least*” among them Gilligan.

2–In the end, you see, this is a picture of what can happen in Christian small groups: Like them, *our* groups often consist of a motley, odd collection of people with whom we don't *think* we have *anything* in common.

3–But if we'll stick with them, after a while they begin to rub off on us. And soon the people who annoyed and irritated us so much at first become the very people that God uses to most shape our lives.<sup>6</sup>

7. Every Monday night (except Admin. Council nights), I participate in a Christian men's covenant group, where I'm *not* the leader or "preacher" or "Rev./Dr." but just "Brian."

A–It's a group that supports, cares, and prays for me and each other in whatever we're all facing. But it's also a group that challenges each of us (myself included) to be more/better than we currently are. And my life is richer because of my relationships in that group.

B–I wonder: ...Do you have Christian friends who'll do that for you? ...Who'll not only support and care for you, but will lovingly *challenge* you to grow in your faith and become more than you already are?

1–Now many of you do. You're in a Sunday School class, or "Disciple" Bible Study, or a Music or recreation or some other group here that accomplishes these.

2–But many (if not most) of you are NOT in such a group, and you're missing out on one of the greatest blessings that God wants to give you.

C–And my prayer is that today, you'll allow your church family to help you find these kinds of experiences and relationships through the small groups of your church.

8. So here's how I want to close: in your bulletin you'll find a brochure that says "*Keepin' the Party Goin'*" ... please take it out... (raise your hand if you need one).

A–The brochure describes nearly 50 small groups of various sizes and types that our church currently offers as tools for healthy Christian growth and development.

B–Following my prayer, I want to invite you to complete the brochure and bring it forward as your response to God today – your way of saying you'll try out at least one small group.

C–The bottom line, you see, is that if you and I want to "***Keep the Party [of God's Salvation] Goin'***" in our lives, then we're going to need the kind of relationships only found in Christian small groups.<sup>7</sup>

9. [Please join hands with the person next to you as we have our closing **PRAYER...**]

10. [CLOSING SONG]

## ENDNOTES:

1. Much of the inspiration for this sermon was borrowed generally from the Online Podcast sermon “*The Importance of Shipmates*” by Rev. Adam Hamilton (Senior Pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection, Kansas City, MO), September 9, 2007.

2. In Matthew 18:20, Jesus himself said “*Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in their midst.*” It’s not that Christ is not present when we’re by ourselves, but that there is something special and unique that happens when more than one of us gather in God’s name. Read also Acts 2:43-47, that tells us that the pattern of the early church was that after people were converted, they became part of small groups for Christian relationships and growth.

3. Some people think that the Christian life begins and ends by our acceptance of Jesus as a our Savior. But what the Bible actually teaches is that while that’s the *beginning* of our faith walk, it’s not the *end*. No, the goal of the Christian life is not just our *conversion* but our *sanctification* – our growth in the faith, so that we might become more and more like Jesus each and every day for the rest of our lives, changed daily by the Holy Spirit from the inside out. Consequently, not only small groups, but the Church itself is God’s idea as a means of sanctification. In other words, they’re *not* the idea of some human being, or bureaucratic institution, but the idea of *God himself!*

4. These two correspond to the two primary reasons why the book of Genesis says that God created humanity male and female so that neither would be alone: for Companionship (support and care); and for Helping (someone to “help” us become who God wants us to be).

5. Like on “Gilligan’s Island,” in most every small group you’ll probably find a Skipper (someone who likes to take charge), a hapless first mate (someone who you wonder how they made it this far, but who in the end helps brings about the salvation of everyone else), a homecoming queen and movie star (Ginger), one who has the gift of hospitality (the Mary Ann of your group), some people who have more money than anyone else (the Howells), and always at least one geeky, left-brain person who doesn’t get the whole “spiritual thing” and needs help (the Professor).

6. Two more objections to involvement in a small group are:

**(Objection #2:)** I’ll hear people say, “*But Pastor, I just don’t have time to commit to a small group. I’m too busy!*” Well, truth be told, we’re ALL busy. Probably NONE of us has *time* for this kind of thing. But I’ve noticed that most people tend to *make time* for what’s important to them. So I’d simply say that if having genuine relationships in life is of value, then we simply must make an intentional decision and effort that this is going to be a priority in our lives.

One way to test if we have made this a priority is to ask the question: if your world caved in at 3am, who would you be able to call? Who would you call on? Hopefully each of us has friends who are companions in this journey of life that we could call. If we can’t think of anyone who we could call, then perhaps it indicates we need to start cultivating these kind of relationships. A corollary question we could ask is: on whose list are WE? Who would call US at 3am if they were in trouble? If we’re *not* on such a list, it may indicate that we need to work on our vulnerability so that others know we care about them. The bottom line is that each of us has to make an intentional effort to develop these kind of relationships. They don’t just “happen” by themselves. One of the keys to developing healthy relationships is something most of us already know. It’s a cliché but it’s true: “*If you want a friend, be a friend.*” If we want to *develop* life-enriching relationships, then we’ve got to *give* life-enrichment to other people. Deep, abiding friendships require risk and sacrifice.

**(Objection #3:)** I’ll hear people say, “*Pastor, I already have good friends like this outside the church. So why do I need Christian/church friends, too?*” Well, let me first say that not only is it good to have non-Christian friends, but I believe that it’s absolutely essential that ALL Christians have at least *some*, so that we can fulfill our God-given calling to be “salt and light” by sharing Christ with them (Read Matthew 5:13-16).

A problem happens, though, if most of our deep friendships are *outside* the Christian faith, because then we'll often find ourselves being drawn in directions contrary to our faith. For example, the answers our non-Christian friends may suggest to our life problems, and the things they'll want us to do in our spare time, may be very different from what our faith teaches us. And if we're not careful, then over time we'll find it increasingly difficult walk the path of Christ, unless we also have Christian friends in the church who'll encourage and challenge us to walk in God's ways.

7. So then, "Party Planning" involves *Inviting*, *Welcoming*, and *Incorporating* so that both we and others can experience God's "party" of salvation from now on. And remember that *our* "Party Planning" for God *today* may just help prepare someone *else's* life *for eternity!*