



"The Call: The Life and Ministry of the Apostle Paul"

By Pastor Adam Hamilton

Session 1: Called to Follow Christ

(January 8, 2026 6:30 PM)

INTRODUCTION

- When you think of the Apostle Paul, what comes to mind?
- It could reasonably be argued that no other human, apart from Jesus himself, has had a greater impact on the world than Paul of Tarsus. Do you agree? Why? Why not?
- Yet, Paul is not without his critics. Who criticized Paul throughout Christian history? Why has Paul been criticized?

Pastor Adam Hamilton wrote his book, "The Call", and created this Bible study out of his deep respect and appreciation for Paul. My hope is that we will gain or grow that appreciation through our study.

OPENING PRAYER

Holy God, we come together this evening eager to make connections between the life and message of Paul and our own life and faith. Guide us as together we seek answers to how Paul's story speaks to our own story, that we may better understand how and to what God is calling us. In the name of Jesus Christ, whom Paul first persecuted and later sought to follow. Amen.

About our Author – Pastor Adam Hamilton

Adam Hamilton is senior pastor of The United Methodist Church of the Resurrection in Leawood, Kansas. Hamilton states his aim is “not simply to teach about Paul, but to help modern-day Christians deepen their own faith and answer God’s call upon their lives by studying Paul’s life, story, and call.” Through the video, Hamilton will take us to key places where Paul lived out his ministry – to Tarsus where Paul grew up; to Damascus, where as a persecutor of early Christians he met the risen Christ, and to Syrian Antioch, where Paul’s missionary ministry began.

Session 1 Video – “Called to Follow Christ”

- Paul, in his early training, had “one foot in two worlds” (Greek and Jewish). How do you think this may have affected his life and ministry?
- Paul stood by and may even have approved the stoning of the early church martyr Stephen. How could Paul, as an observant Jew, condone and participate in such actions?
- Paul, blinded physically and spiritually on the road to Damascus, was “right where God needs him to be.” What do you think is meant by this?
- How would you have felt if you were Ananias, told by the Holy Spirit to help Paul, the persecutor of Christians? What would you have done?

PAUL’S HOME AND EARLY LIFE

Scripture Focus – Acts 22:3a, 21:39b, Philippians 3:5, Acts 22:3b, Galatians 1:14a, Acts 22:4

1st century Map – Tarsus (Paul's early life and early ministry)



- How do you imagine the location and circumstances of Paul's early life influenced the man he became?
- Hamilton observes that in his experience, the most difficult or painful parts of his past are often the very events that have made good things possible in his adulthood. Would you agree? What are some of the difficult things that have shaped you?

FROM PERSECUTOR TO ADVOCATE

Scripture Focus – Acts 7:58-60; 8:1, 3; 9:1-2, 11, 13, 17-18; 26:12-15

- Hamilton observes that it was Paul's personal ambition, coupled with his unwavering religious conviction, that motivated his persecution of the followers of the Way and specifically his volunteering to oversee Stephen's execution. He suggests that these two motivating factors can be a dangerous combination. Do you agree? Why or why not?

- In what ways or in what circumstances do you struggle with ambition?
- What is a goad? Have you experienced God goading you through the gentle nudgings of someone else? How did you respond?
- Has someone served as your Ananias? Looking back, can you identify a time when you believe God was using you as an Ananias for someone else?

THE IN BETWEEN TIME

Scripture Focus – Acts 9:19b-22, 23; Galatians 1:11-17

- Which other biblical figures spent time in the wilderness? How was their time spent there?
- While we cannot be sure about Paul's sojourn, Hamilton speculates that Paul may have spent the three years working out his theology. What do you think?
- Hamilton suggests that we all need times for silence and solitude for study, prayer, reflection, and listening for God's voice. How and where in your life do you make time for these spiritual practices?

“The Jews” – “Throughout the Book of Acts, Luke refers to those who opposed the gospel and sought to suppress Christianity as “the Jews”. The phrase appears at least forty-four times in Acts, almost always negatively. John’s Gospel uses the same term for those who opposed Jesus, with the phrase appearing at least sixty times in his Gospel. Unfortunately, use of the term would contribute to anti-Semitism that reared its head throughout church history. “The Jews” became the killers of Christ and the persecutors of the church. Lost was the fact that Jesus was a Jew, the disciples were Jews, Paul was a Jew, and nearly all the thousands of Christ’s followers at the time of Paul’s conversion were Jews...Had Luke and John known the impact their language would have and the anti-Semitism it would foster, I believe they would have chosen a different term. They were not referring to all Jews, nor even to most Jews, but to a small number of Jewish leaders who actively sought to suppress Jesus’ message or the early church.” (“The Call”, pages 31 – 32, Adam Hamilton)

Scripture Focus – Galatians 1:18-19, 2:1-11; Acts 9:26-27, 28-30

- Hamilton suggests reasons why there may have been tension between Paul and Peter. What do you think? In what ways might the differences between the two men have played into their strained relationship?

Hamilton tells us that Paul returned to his home, Tarsus, and apparently lived there for some years after his conversion before beginning his ministry.

- Are you in the “in-between” years now?

“In between” can apply to young adults trying to discern their vocation, middle year adults contemplating a vocation change or other life decisions, or senior adults entering retirement and struggling with how to live out their lives in discipleship to Christ.

THE ROLE OF BARNABAS

Scripture Focus – Acts 4:36-37; Acts 11:19-26

- How did Barnabas exemplify the meaning of his name?

CLOSING

- What particularly struck you about what you learned about Paul’s life? Were there any surprises?

In this chapter, Hamilton offers several suggestions of practices to deepen the life of faith. I would encourage you in the coming weeks to try some of these suggestions or one or more of the following...

1. **Breath Prayer:** Hamilton suggests using a line from Psalm 115:1 as a breath prayer as a means of submitting our ambition to God. “Not to us, O Lord, not to us, but to your name give glory.” Another breath prayer, this one to focus our attention on other parts of our lives, coming from the lyrics of “Amazing Grace” – “I once was lost, but now am found” on the inhale; “Was blind, but now I see” on the exhale.

2. **Who is Your Barnabas?** – Reflect on the two questions that end the chapter: Who is your Barnabas? Whose Barnabas will you be? Give thanks to God in prayer for “Barnabas’s” in your life, and ask God to help you discern as to how you might fill that role for another.
3. **The Story of “Amazing Grace”** – John Newton became involved in the Atlantic slave trade. In 1748, a violent storm battered his vessel off the coast of Donegal in Ireland so severely that he called out to God for mercy, a moment that marked his spiritual conversion. Newton wrote the first verse of the hymn to mark the experience. Sing or recite the first verse of “Amazing Grace” each day of this upcoming week, once in the morning and once in the evening.

CLOSING PRAYER

Gracious God, we give thanks for the light of your love that illuminates our lives and turns us away from destructive patterns. Grant us insight into how you would have us serve you. In the name of Jesus Christ, Amen.

Session 2: “Called to Go: Paul’s First Missionary Journey”

Thursday, January 15 6:30 PM Facebook Live

(If you have the book, read Chapter 2 in advance.)
