

“The Call: The Life and Ministry of the Apostle Paul”

By Pastor Adam Hamilton

Session 4: Called to Love

(January 28, 2026 6:30 PM)

INTRODUCTION

Paul's Timeline So Far...

- 5 BC – 10 AD – Paul is born (estimate)
- 16 – 22 AD – Paul begins Jewish studies in Jerusalem
- 32 AD – Paul arrests Jesus followers in Palestine (estimate)
- 35 AD – Paul is converted on road to Damascus (estimate)
- 35 – 38 AD – Paul in Arabia, then Damascus
- 38 AD – Paul meets Peter and James in Jerusalem
- 38 – 48 AD – Paul in Tarsus and region (estimate)
- 47 AD – Barnabas to Syrian Antioch; with Paul at Tarsus
- 48 AD – Paul and Barnabas to Jerusalem
- 49 AD – Paul and Barnabas begin “first” missionary journey
- 49 – 50 AD – Paul and Barnabas return to Syrian Antioch
- 49 – 50 AD – Paul writes Galatians (?)
- 50 AD – Conflict over Circumcision
- 50 AD – Jerusalem Council
- 50 AD – Paul and Silas begin second missionary journey
- 50 – 51 AD – To Galatia, Macedonia, Achaia
- 52 AD – Paul returns to Syrian Antioch



Visualization...

- What are your thoughts as you walk?
- As you anticipate arriving at Thessalonica, what are your hopes for the ministry there?
- What are your fears?

In our session this evening, we will further explore Paul's second missionary journey, focusing on what happened in Thessalonica, Berea, Athens, and Corinth.

OPENING PRAYER

Loving God, we yearn to encounter you in your Word. Make us aware of your presence as we seek to make your story our story. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Session 4 Video – “Called to Love”

Paul and Silas completed the Second Missionary Journey, traveling to Thessalonica, Berea, and on to Athens, where Paul reasoned with the Athenians at the Areopagus. At the important city of Corinth, he countered immorality at the pagan temples with moving words about God’s love. Reflect on the following questions as you watch the video...

- What approach did Paul take when he preached to the Athenians? Why? What does it teach us about sharing our faith with diverse groups?
- What were some of the issues that Paul preached about in Corinth? Why?
- What kind of city was Corinth? Why was sexual immorality more common there, and how did Paul try to counter it?
- What does Hamilton say we can learn about political disagreements by observing the Corinthians and what Paul told them?

IN THESSALONICA AND BEROEA

Scripture Reading – Acts 17:2-4

- What form did Paul’s opposition take? What was the result?
- The book tells us that those opposing Paul and his colleagues accused them of “turning the world upside down.” Do you think that accusation can still be made of believers today? Why or why not?

Scripture Reading – 1 Thessalonians 1:5-6, 2:11-12

- What does this passage from Paul’s first letter to the Thessalonians tell us about Paul’s ministry there?

Following Thessalonica, Paul traveled to the town of Beroea. The same people causing trouble in Thessalonica followed Paul to cause problems in Beroea. Paul left Silas and Timothy in Beroea, urging them to come as soon as they could, and he journeyed to Athens along with some of the new Beroean believers.

IN ATHENS

Scripture Focus – Acts 17:16-22a.

Imagine that you are an Athenian intellectual and philosopher gathered in the marketplace, curious to hear what Paul has to say about this new religion.

Scripture Focus – Acts 17:22b-34

- What did you think about what Paul had to say about the unknown god?
- Hamilton tells us that Paul quoted two poets from the past. How did he apply those quotes to the god he was talking about?
- What was his argument about not worshipping things made by human hands? Did you agree or disagree? Why?
- What other thoughts do you have about his speech? Do you think you would be willing to hear more?

Now, step out of character...

- Few came to faith under Paul's leadership in Athens, but those few laid the foundations for a church that impacted millions. The author notes that in our churches, numbers are only one indicator of success, but they are not the only measure or even the best. How do you define "success" in the church?
- Other than large increases in membership numbers, what other indicators or metrics can you name that might enable us to measure the kind of success you have described?

IN CORINTH

- Based on the details in the video, what made the city of Corinth a strategic location for commerce?

Scripture Focus: Acts 18:1-6

- Whom did Paul encounter first in Corinth, and why were those two people there?
- What happened when Paul preached and taught in the synagogue in Corinth? What did he do in response?
- Paul devotes more verses to the subject of sexual immorality in 1 Corinthians than in any other letter. What features in Corinth life might help explain that?

EXAMINING LETTERS TO THE CORINTHIANS

In the four years after Paul visited Corinth, he wrote four letters to the Corinthians, and the book of 1 Corinthians is one of those four. In 1 Corinthians and to a lesser degree in 2 Corinthians, we get a window into the issues the Corinthian church was facing.

Most scholars believe that Paul wrote a minimum of 4 letters to the Church at Corinth. The first letter – a missing letter – is referred to by Paul in 1 Corinthians 5:9. This letter sought to address theological questions that the Corinthians had for Paul. The second letter – our 1 Corinthians – further discusses some additional theological questions that the Corinthians had for Paul. The third letter – 2 Corinthians chapters 10 – 13 – is an angry, tearful letter addressing those who have turned from Paul's teaching, listening to other new "teachers". The fourth letter – 2 Corinthians chapters 1 – 9 – is a conciliatory letter, written after relationships and issues have been healed. These letters give us a glimpse of the struggles, questions, concerns, and teaching the early Christian church would receive.

- If you had the opportunity to ask Paul questions, what would the subject matter be?
- Since we cannot turn to Paul in person now, who do you go to for spiritual, theological, and ethical advice?

CLOSING

- What particularly struck you about this early church disagreement and Paul's second missionary journey? Were there any surprises?

More Ways to Deepen Faith...

1. **Walking Prayer** – Hamilton helps us to visualize Paul's journeys by giving us a glimpse of landmarks and terrain and helping us understand the distances Paul and his colleagues had to walk. (Remember our opening activity!) Try engaging in a walking prayer during the coming week. Choose a route for walking, and as you begin, try centering yourself to be receptive to God's spirit. Paul and his friends had to carry tents, clothing, and supplies as they walked from town to town. Reflect on the following as you walk...
 - i. What are the attitudes, ideas, and assumptions I carry with me as I seek to answer God's call?
 - ii. Which ones are necessary for equipping me as a disciple?
 - iii. Which ones are weighing me down and making my faith journey more difficult?
2. **Email Conversation** – Engage in online conversations with a trusted believer on one or more of questions that you would have "asked Paul" about. Share thoughts on the different topics. If you feel led, invite other friends into the conversation as well.

A Reflection on 1 Corinthians 13...

A possible test of one's spiritual life can be made by inserting one's own name in place of the word "love" and "it" in this familiar Pauline passage. Starting with verse 4, speak the passage out loud, adding your name. Conclude with verse 7.

CLOSING PRAYER

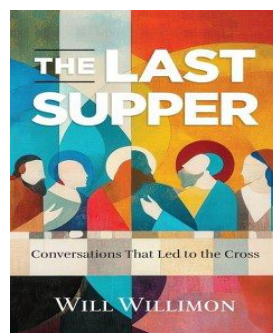
Loving God, guide us as we seek to emulate the most profound example of love made incarnate, your Son, Jesus Christ. Make us aware of your presence with us, guiding us by your Spirit as we continue our journey as followers of the Way. In the name of the One who came to show us what your love is like, your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen.

Session 5: "Called to Give: Paul's Third Missionary Journey"

Thursday, February 5 6:30 PM Facebook Live

(If you have the book, read Chapter 5 in advance.)

New Lenten Study...



"The Last Supper: Conversations that Led to the Cross"

By Will Willimon

Study begins Sunday, February 22!
