

PARTICIPANT GUIDE
PAUL – SESSION 4 (Called to Love)

Remember that you can attend any group at any time:

Mon @ 3 pm – Sandy Stein; Thurs @ noon – Jeff Vamos; Thurs @ 7:30 pm – Sandra Dennis

Opening Prayer: Loving God, guide us as we seek to follow the most profound example of love made flesh in Jesus Christ, your Son. Make us aware of your presence with us, guiding us by your Spirit as we grow and mature in our faith. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Last session summary: The third session video focused on Paul's second missionary journey. For this journey, Paul partnered with Silas, and together they took the gospel to Philippi, where they met Lydia, whom they baptized along with her household. They also drove evil spirits from a slave girl, and were thrown into prison. An earthquake freed them, but not before they converted their jailer and his household before leaving Philippi.

Intro

In today's video, Paul and Silas complete the second missionary journey, traveling to Thessalonica, Berea and on to Athens, where Paul preaches on the Areopagus. Paul encounters a great deal of resistance along the way. When he got to Corinth, Paul countered the immorality he found there with moving words about God's love.

View video (13:45) – you may see this ahead of time

Questions for the group

1. The book of Acts, chapter 17, is the backdrop for this video. The video focuses on Paul's reception in Athens and Corinth, but it is important to recognize the constant resistance that Paul experienced elsewhere. For instance, note what happened in Thessalonica (Acts 17:2-7):
And Paul went in, as was his custom, and on three sabbath days argued with them from the scriptures, ³ explaining and proving that it was necessary for the Messiah to suffer and to rise from the dead, and saying, "This is the Messiah, Jesus whom I am proclaiming to you." ⁴ Some of them were persuaded and joined Paul and Silas, as did a great many of the devout Greeks and not a few of the leading women. ⁵ But the Jews became jealous, and with the help of some ruffians in the marketplaces they formed a mob and set the city in an uproar. While they were searching for Paul and Silas to bring them out to the assembly, they attacked Jason's house. ⁶ When they could not find them, they dragged Jason and some believers before the city authorities, shouting, "These people who have been turning the world upside down have come here also, ⁷ and Jason has entertained them as guests. They are all acting contrary to the decrees of the emperor, saying that there is another king named Jesus."

What do you think the authorities meant when they said that Paul's preaching has been "turning the world upside down"? Has there been a time when you heard a speaker or preacher turn YOUR world upside down? What makes such a dramatic shift in perspective a threat? Do you think the accusation that believers in Jesus are "turning the world upside down" applies today?

2. In Thessalonica, Paul presented Jesus as an alternative power to rival the Emperor. This was a very political message. In your opinion, is the gospel inherently political? Is it possible to separate church from state, when what is at stake is ultimate allegiance to one power or another? Why or why not.

3. Paul and Silas flee to Beroea. But even there the Thessalonians show up to protest his preaching.

But when the Jews of Thessalonica learned that the word of God had been proclaimed by Paul in Beroea as well, they came there too, to stir up and incite the crowds. ¹⁴ Then the believers immediately sent Paul away...

Why do you think that Paul continued to preach despite such opposition? Where did he find the strength to go on? Do you think Paul had second thoughts about his "call" to preach the gospel since he literally had to skip town in the night repeatedly?

4. Paul makes it to Athens and then gives this sermon in front of the Areopagus:

"Athenians, I see how extremely religious you are in every way. ²³ For as I went through the city and looked carefully at the objects of your worship, I found among them an altar with the inscription, 'To an unknown god.' What therefore you worship as unknown, this I proclaim to you. ²⁴ The God who made the world and everything in it, he who is Lord of heaven and earth, does not live in shrines made by human hands, ²⁵ nor is he served by human hands, as though he needed anything, since he himself gives to all mortals life and breath and all things. ²⁶ From one ancestor he made all nations to inhabit the whole earth, and he allotted the times of their existence and the boundaries of the places where they would live, ²⁷ so that they would search for God and perhaps grope for him and find him—though indeed he is not far from each one of us. ²⁸ For 'In him we live and move and have our being'; as even some of your own poets have said, 'For we too are his offspring.' ²⁹ Since we are God's offspring, we ought not to think that the deity is like gold, or silver, or stone, an image formed by the art and imagination of mortals. ³⁰ While God has overlooked the times of human ignorance, now he commands all people everywhere to repent, ³¹ because he has fixed a day on which he will have the world judged in righteousness by a man whom he has appointed, and of this he has given assurance to all by raising him from the dead."

What tone do you think this sermon has (judgmental, harsh, reasoned, inviting, critical, positive, engaging). How does this sermon address the multiple deities worshiped in Corinth? Idols? The nearness or aloofness of God? The fact that Jesus, the central

figure of Christianity, is not a Greek and Judaism is a foreign religion? Where does the truth and validity of the Christian faith rest for Paul?

5. Adam Hamilton ends this video with a comment that in the face of sexual immorality and temple prostitution, Paul redefines what real love is. 1 Corinthians 13 is an extended definition of Christian love:

Love is patient; love is kind; love is not envious or boastful or arrogant ⁵ or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; ⁶ it does not rejoice in wrongdoing, but rejoices in the truth. ⁷ It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends.

Why do you think that love is defined more by what it is NOT than what it IS? How do the “nots” speak to the culture in Corinth? How might the “nots” speak to our culture? Replace the word “love” with your own name as a way to keep this passage in your heart during Lent.

Closing prayer: Holy God, you call each of us by name and ask us to follow you. Help us to see the ways that we can answer your call. Enable us to find ways to love each other as we seek to follow Christ. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.