

PARTICIPANT GUIDE
PAUL – SESSION 5 (Called to Give)

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: Gracious God, we know that all good gifts come from you. Make us ever more aware of ways that we, too, can be generous. Open our hearts, our hands, our homes and our lives to share your love. In the name of Jesus Christ, we pray. Amen.

Last session summary: In the fourth session video, Paul and Silas complete the second missionary journey, traveling to Thessalonica, Beroea and on to Athens, where Paul preached on the Areopagus. Paul experienced a great deal of resistance along the way. When he finally got to Corinth, Paul countered the immorality he found there with moving words about God's love.

Intro

In today's video, we track Paul's third missionary journey. Paul revisits churches he had founded before returning to the wealthy city of Ephesus, where he stayed and preached for over 2 years.

View video (14:50) – you may do this ahead of time

Questions for the group

1. The video takes us to the ancient ruins of Ephesus. Have you been there? If so, what do you most remember? Share this with your small group. What strikes you about seeing the ancient city of Ephesus in this video? Why might Paul have been drawn there?
2. Paul stayed in Ephesus for 2 years and 3 months, preaching first in synagogues. Later after his message was rejected there, he rented a lecture hall proximate to the agora.

Paul entered the synagogue and for three months spoke out boldly, and argued persuasively about the kingdom of God.⁹ When some stubbornly refused to believe and spoke evil of the Way before the congregation, he left them, taking the disciples with him, and argued daily in the lecture hall of Tyrannus.¹⁰ This continued for two years, so that all the residents of Asia, both Jews and Greeks, heard the word of the Lord. Acts 19:8-10

What does this tell you about Paul's commitment to the gospel? How do you imagine that Paul had the fortitude to carry on despite opposition?

3. There seems to have been quite a bit of magical thinking evident in Ephesus.

God did extraordinary miracles through Paul, ¹² so that when the handkerchiefs or aprons that had touched his skin were brought to the sick, their diseases left them, and the evil spirits came out of them. ¹³ Then some itinerant Jewish exorcists tried to use the name of the Lord Jesus over those who had evil spirits, saying, "I adjure you by the Jesus whom Paul proclaims." ¹⁴ Seven sons of a Jewish high priest named Sceva were doing this. ¹⁵ But the evil spirit said to them in reply, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are you?" ¹⁶ Then the man with the evil spirit leaped on them, mastered them all, and so overpowered them that they fled out of the house naked and wounded. ¹⁷ When this became known to all residents of Ephesus, both Jews and Greeks, everyone was awestruck; and the name of the Lord Jesus was praised. ¹⁸ Also many of those who became believers confessed and disclosed their practices. ¹⁹ A number of those who practiced magic collected their books and burned them publicly; when the value of these books was calculated, it was found to come to fifty thousand silver coins. ²⁰ So the word of the Lord grew mightily and prevailed. Acts 19:11-20

What strikes you about this account? Do Christians in this text believe in magic too (healing hankies, for instance)? What do you make of this? Have you ever known of Christian hucksters, who claim to have bogus powers? How do we separate the work of the Holy Spirit from bogus claims in our day? Does God still work miracles?

4. Adam Hamilton notes that the incantation scrolls/books mentioned above were destroyed and that this action dramatically affected local artisans and businesses – even the religious commerce connected to the Temple of Artemis. Recall that in Acts, chapter 3, Paul exorcised the spirit of divination from a slave girl, robbing her owners of revenue. How might our Christian faith have economic consequences? What are some examples of how Christian values have determined business practices? How much of a struggle would you have if your business profits and your Christian faith were in conflict? When have you either supported or refused to support a business or cause because its stance or practices violated your moral sensibilities?
5. Why is the intersection of faith and economics so difficult? Adam Hamilton asks us to consider whether we might have an obsession with acquiring “stuff.” How important is it to periodically take stock of spending, accumulation of “stuff,” benevolent giving, giving to the church, etc.? What values are most often in conflict when it is hard to sacrifice or give up our “stuff”?

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. Free us from our bondage to things we do not need, and give us the courage to live out our faith in ways that honor you. We pray these things in Jesus’ name. Amen.