

## MODELS OF IMITATION

### 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10



# And you became imitators of us and of the Lord...

Leslie Strobel became a Christian in 1979 and modeled her faith in such a way that it influenced her atheistic husband Lee to begin his own search for God. In his book *The Case for Christ*, he tells of his 2 years of intensive research that finally led him to receive Jesus as his Savior. With a law degree from Yale and an award-winning career in journalism at the Chicago Tribune, Lee had the ability to answer tough questions raised by unbelievers and cynics.

The change in his life also influenced their 5-year-old daughter Alison, who said, “Mommy, I want God to do for me what He’s done for Daddy.” Leslie’s faith created a ripple effect that changed the whole family.

This pattern of modeling or imitating is what Paul described in the first chapter of 1 Thessalonians. His example, along with that of Silas and Timothy, motivated the new believers in Thessalonica to imitate them (the word “followers” carries that idea). Then, as these new believers suffered for Christ with patience and endurance, they in turn became models to believers in Macedonia and Achaia, inspiring them to new levels of devotion.

Our example can be our most persuasive influence for Christ. Do others imitate us because we model Him?

Only one life, so live it well,  
And keep your candle trimmed and bright;  
Eternity, not time, will tell  
The radius of that candle's light. — Miller

The one who follows Christ leads the way for others.<sup>1</sup>



## OPEN IT

**1. Who was a role model for you as you were growing up? What was it about them that made you look up to them? As you grew older did your admiration for them remain?**

**2. What one word would people use to describe you?**



## EXPLORE IT

**READ 1 THESSALONIANS 1:1-10**

**3. In verses 2 and 3, what things was Paul thankful for?**

**4. In what ways did the gospel come to the church?**

**5. How did the Thessalonians receive the word?**

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<sup>1</sup><http://odb.org/2001/02/09/models-for-imitation>

**6. What tangible acts does Paul declare that point to the Thessalonians' life change?**



**GET IT**

**READ ACTS 15:36 – 16:10**

**7. What event causes Paul and Silas to be teamed up together?**

**8. How does Timothy join the team? What do we know about him?**

**READ ACTS 17:1-9**

From a casual reading of this text, it may seem that Paul stayed in Thessalonica for a short visit. However, most likely it was three to six months in duration. During this time in the city, he went to the synagogue to look for opportunities to teach and interact with unbelievers. As a seasoned teacher and veteran rabbi, Paul would be in his sweet spot. During his three visits he would do the following three things: reason with them from the scriptures, explain and prove that Christ had to suffer the cross and rise from the dead, and finally, that Jesus Christ is the long awaited Savior.

**9. How does Paul's presentation of the gospel compare to how you might talk to friends and neighbors about the good news found in Jesus?**

**10. Do you reason, explain, prove and persuade when you talk to the non-Christian? Why or why not?**

## 11. What was the response of the people after hearing their preaching?

The church in Thessalonica is only a few months old. Its members are very young in their faith, coming from either Judaism or paganism. Everything is new. Fresh moral standards, hope in the return of Jesus, being joined together with other people in a church, and of course persecution, were being experienced for the first time. As John Stott says, you would expect this to be a very wobbly church in a very precarious condition.<sup>2</sup> At the very beginning of his letter, Paul is going to remind the Thessalonian believers of their new identity as Christians. These opening four verses are packed with practical truths about what it means to be a part of God's church, and what in particular are the distinguishing marks of faith.

## 12. Describe a time in your life where you experienced real life change through a church or ministry? What was it about the people and programs of that particular group that had such an impact on your life?

**4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that He has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not only in word, but also in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction.**

Paul's use of the phrase "chosen you" in this letter without any further word of explanation indicates that the Thessalonians would readily understand the significance of the assertion. It seems obvious that doctrinal instruction had been given to them on the point. The doctrine of election confuses some people, frightens a few and angers others, yet none of these responses is justified. Someone once said, "Try to explain election, and you may lose your mind. But explain it away — and you may lose your soul!"

We will never understand all that is involved in God's election this side of heaven, but we should not ignore this important doctrine taught throughout Scripture. To be sure, the fact that one is elect or chosen cannot be known until after a person has been saved. Paul was able to recognize

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<sup>2</sup>John Stott, *The Message of 1 & 2 Thessalonians*, (IVP, 1991)

that the Thessalonians were chosen by their response to the gospel as discussed in verses 5–8. Stated another way, a changed life reveals God’s choice and our faith.<sup>3</sup>

**13. What hope and peace can come from knowing that our salvation is bound up in the sovereign choice of God?**

**a. How might this theology have helped to unite the church that consisted of Jews and Gentiles?**

**b. How does the doctrine of election (being chosen by God) keep us from becoming proud when we do great things for God?**

The sincerity of their faith was manifested in good works, their love manifested in labor, and their hope manifested in perseverance. It’s important to note the correlation between the unseen quality and its visible manifestation. How do you measure something invisible like faith? By external works. How do you measure the unseen depth of someone’s love? By what they’re willing to endure (toil or labor). How do you measure the veracity of someone’s hope in the Lord? By their perseverance through adversity. Labor, works, and perseverance are the external manifestations of invisible qualities: the metrics by which we calibrate faith, hope, and love.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup>[http://www.preceptaustin.org/1\\_thessalonians\\_13-4.htm](http://www.preceptaustin.org/1_thessalonians_13-4.htm)

<sup>4</sup><http://crupressgreen.com/wp-content/uploads/2012/04/multiplyingdisciples.pdf>

**14. Thinking about your own life and spiritual journey with Christ, how have these characteristics worked themselves out in your life?**

**a. What works have been produced in your life by faith? (Be specific.)**

**b. What labor have you seen in your life prompted by love?**

**c. How have you experienced spiritual endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ?**

They had responded to the gospel with great joy and were in the middle of a process where they were learning to live life by following the example of others (including Jesus as well as Paul, Silas and Timothy). The word in verse 6, imitators (mimetai), is the word from which our word “mimic” comes from. Literally it means to copy something or someone. The Bible addresses the importance for younger Christians to mimic the life and practices of more mature believers.

Therefore I urge you to imitate me.

**1 Corinthians 4:16**

For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example...

**2 Thessalonians 3:7**

I plead with you, brothers, become like me...

**Galatians 4:12**

Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you.

**Philippians 3:17**

Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children.

**Ephesians 5:1**

**15. Alongside our Savior Jesus Christ, are you deliberately imitating other believers? Why or Why not?**

**a. In what areas could you use some positive Christian examples to follow?**

**b. Would you feel odd encouraging a new Christian to look at the patterns of your life and imitate you? Why or why not?**

**c. When is it wise and when is it unwise to imitate another Christian?**

In Acts 17:6 Paul and his team are accused of turning the word upside down in Thessalonica. Then in 1 Thess. 1:7 we are told that the word “sounded forth” to the neighboring regions. Paul says the powerful witness of the Thessalonian Christians “rang out,” which paints the picture of an echo, which expands outward in ever growing sound. In fact, their faith had become known “everywhere.” It’s not just that the Thessalonians engaged in outreach and evangelism, but their faith flowed from their lives.

**16. Do you believe that the Gospel still has the power to “turn the world upside down”? If not why?**

**a. If so then what keeps us from seeing this power unleashed?**

**b. What specific ways are you seeing the gospel impact the world around you?**

Paul tells us that many of the people in the church had left pagan idols to follow Christ. Living in the region of Greece would have meant that Greek mythology was alive and well in those days. In fact, Thessalonica was only a one-day journey to Mount Olympus, the capital city of the Greek gods. This would mean one thing, that turning away from such beliefs in the gods would be to live in total contradiction to the culture.

**17. While we may not follow mythological gods who live on a mountain, what are some of our idols today?**

**a. From what idols have you turned since you followed Christ?**

**b. What has that turning looked like?**



Our passage ends with a waiting church, trusting in a God who rescues us from the coming wrath (v. 10).

**18. What makes waiting on things so hard?**

a. **Why can we have confidence that our waiting won't be in vain?**

b. **Knowing God will save us from the wrath of condemnation and hell, in what way can we imitate Him until He comes back?**

**19. Take time to close in prayer as a group praising and thanking God for the following things:**

**The salvation God has given us to share in.**

**The word of God that speaks truth and life to nourish our souls.**

**The role other believers play in showing us what being a Christian is all about.**

**The power of the gospel that still changes lives today.**