

Sunday Update
18th October 2020

1 Thessalonians 1:1-10

Paul, Silas and Timothy, To the church of the Thessalonians in God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace and peace to you. 2 We always thank God for all of you and mentioning you in our prayers. 3 We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

4 For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 5 because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. 6 You became imitators of us and of the Lord; in spite of severe suffering, you welcomed the message with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. 7 And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 8 The Lord's message rang out from you not only in Macedonia and Achaia – your faith in God has become known everywhere. Therefore we do not need to say anything about it, 9 for they themselves report what kind of reception you gave us. They tell how you turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God, 10 and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead – Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

Do you have a role model in life? Is there someone that you look up to in such a way that you want to be like them? Young people cover their bedroom walls with posters of people that they want to be like: football players, other sports stars, musicians, pop idols; sometimes they have their hair cut and shaped in a particular way because that's the way their role model has it, or the clothes they wear are shaped by the clothes that their idols wear. Maybe you've met someone in life who has done that for you in a different way: a work colleague for example, who has shaped the way in which you have done your work, looking to work in the way you have seen in someone else. Having a role model can be a good thing for us, inspiring us to reach for new heights that we didn't know existed before, though it can also be dangerous when we discover that they have feet of clay and are just ordinary human beings like us!! What are the good qualities of our lives that we have learned from someone else?

Do we have a role model church? Have we discovered a church that we would like our church to be like? It is always fascinating to meet people who are part of a church somewhere else, to listen to them and discover what their church is like. We can listen to them describe their priorities and the ways by which their church does mission in their community. We can learn new songs to sing. Our church life can be shaped and influenced a bit by what we see in other churches. Do you remember what they about the perfect Church? It doesn't exist! If it did exist, don't join it because as soon as I join it, it is no longer perfect! I've also seen people admire churches and tried, in their own church, to import a role model church in a different place and it hasn't worked.

Thessalonica was (and still is) a seaport on the coast of northern Greece; it is the second-largest city in Greece and the capital of the region of Macedonia. Paul and Silas (and Timothy?) had visited the city, a visit recorded in Acts chapter 17; it seems to have been a short visit, because their ministry there caused a riot (literally) and they were forced to leave under cover of darkness for their own safety. However, short visit or not, they had made their mark on the new Christians; a group of people were persuaded that this new Christian message was a good thing and they believed in Jesus as their Saviour and this new-found faith changed their lives. This letter, 1 Thessalonians, is amongst the earliest documents in the New Testament, as Paul writes to these young Christians to give them support in their new-found faith.

First of all, Paul gives thanks for the Christians and for the quality of their lives. He picks out three big qualities: their faith, their love and their hope and gives thanks to God for these qualities. These are qualities at the root of who we are as Christians. He then goes on to give thanks for the ways in which these qualities have impacted on their day-to-day lives: *“We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labour prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.”* (verse 3) These three root values have shaped the way in which the Christians live: they work hard at being Christian disciples because they believe in Jesus; there is a labour of love that they toil hard at fulfilling; their hope gives them resilience to keep believing. As part of their coming to faith, they have also turned away from the Greek and Roman culture of idols and “gods”.

“So you became a model...” (verse 7) This young Church has become the model church for other parts of Greece, and beyond – *“your faith in God has become known everywhere.”* (verse 10) This young church has become the role model for churches elsewhere. Other churches are looking at the church in Thessalonica and saying “We want to be like that!” We understand that there are 2 elements to that: the first element is the root qualities and values of the Christians, that their lives are full of faith, love and hope and the fruit of these qualities that we’ve talked about above. The second element is their story, that people have heard about their turning away from idols and turning to God, and they are trying to copy that move. Other Christians have heard about their life and want to be like that too! The Thessalonian church has become the model church, the church that others are looking to for their inspiration; the Thessalonian church influenced and shaped the life of the church in many other parts of Greece.

There was more to it than that! There are at least 3 levels of copying going on here. Working backwards, thirdly, the Christians in other parts of Greece are copying the model that comes from Thessalonica; for their part, secondly the Thessalonians have imitated Paul and Silas; the first part of this process of copying is that Paul and Silas have been imitators of Jesus. The ultimate role model in this story is not the Thessalonian church, but is the Lord Jesus Christ. For all that people were using this church as a model, they were a model only because they had become imitators of Paul and Silas who had been imitators of Jesus. That’s where this Bible passage leads us, to be people shaped by Jesus, to be a church shaped by Jesus. Faith, love and hope are good values to copy, as are the work, labour and resilience of the Thessalonians; we should learn to be like that too!

Some 10 or 15 years ago there was a fashion for wearing wristbands, usually made of plastic, but sometimes made of little beads. These wristbands were worn in support of causes like Make Poverty History or health projects. Some of them were simply made up of initials and were often conversation-starters. WWJD was one: it stands for “What would Jesus do?” The wristbands may have gone out of fashion, but the question is still one that demands our keen attention. In almost every circumstance and situation in life, when we are faced with a choice or a decision to make, “What would Jesus do?” is the key; even asking that question leads us into the place where we can imitate Jesus. We may not always succeed; we may not always carry through the answer as to what Jesus would do, but the question is such a good question. It is key to the kind of people we are. Jesus is the ultimate role model for our lives: what are the qualities we see in Him? How does He live and behave? How can we be like that? Is He the model for our lives?

Prayer: thank You for the gospel and for the Bible that tells us the good news; thank you for the impact of the gospel on these early Christians, for their faith, love and hope, for their work, labour and endurance. Create these qualities in us, that we may believe, love and have hope, and that we may

work hard, do the labour of love, and have resilience, and be the kind of people You want us to be. Thank you for their influence on others, drawing other to Jesus by the witness of their words and their life, copying Jesus. Help us to draw other to Jesus in our community by our words and by our life, as we try to copy Jesus too.

Day by day, dear Lord of you

Three things I pray:

To see you more clearly,

To love you more dearly,

To follow you more nearly,

Day by day.

Please take time during the week to pray for the people referred to in these topics:

- For church in our community and elsewhere – for resilience in the midst of much that is hard. How does the church communicate with people outside its community at the moment? Is mission shut down? Can people still see Jesus in us even when we are isolated? For Churches across the city and country, wrestling with the same questions.
- For those who teach the Bible and the work of the Scottish Bible Society, making the Bible available to us and to people across the world; Elaine Duncan, the CEO.
- Pray for those our children and young people and teachers on school holidays this week, a time to be refreshed; those at school and struggling with the lingering effects of lockdown earlier this year; for students who are caught in the Covid situation and the universities in the way they handle this situation.
- For effects of lockdown again, new measures and their impact; pray that they work to curb spread of Covid, let numbers go down again and people be safe; let our society be open again and let us be free from fear and anxiety.
- NHS staff, care home staff, those caring in the community – God keep them safe.
- For the way we and others behave with regard to Covid, to be careful and not reckless; for people to be wise in the way we behave, to observe social distancing and to take notice of people who may be weaker and more vulnerable.
- Those still working from home – what does the future look like? Is this the way they will do their work from now on? Others deeply wishing they were back in an office; some facing a long prospect of this continuing into 2021; may they be healthy in body, mind and spirit.
- People whose hearts and minds are feeling “shut-in”; some still furloughed, others having lost their job and feeling a lack of purpose in life; for whom the physical lockdown is affecting their mental health and sense of well-being and freedom. For victims of domestic violence, with nowhere to escape to.
- For the virus to go away completely; pray that science will find a vaccine.
- Our community, caring for vulnerable people, helping those in need, for resilience and strength.
- Our political leaders, trying to make difficult decisions in the right way.
- For one another, sustaining our faith when there is nothing of the outward life of the church.
- People who are weak and vulnerable today, those who mourn, those who are sick, those who are isolated and lonely; those in hospital; those who are still shielding; pray for people you know by name.

Here are some links to hymns you might know and love; go and have a listen.

Praise my soul the king of heaven

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GyRIVbdsi4c>

My hope is built

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ty8tw7ydxB4>

Yet not I but through Christ in me

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zundjUFazfg>

As the deer

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FBppKZ0eJlQ>

Hear the call of the Kingdom

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WL-UdwB0Qvc>

Remember the prayer e-mail line at prayerjgpc@gmail.com

Some other resources:

- Each Sunday at 10.30am, we will have a short time together using Zoom; a link has been sent out in the e-mail with this update which should enable you to join in.
- This reflection is available on our own church website under the “sermons” tab and there is an archive of sermon material there for you to read and links to the video reflections – www.jgpc.org.uk
- If you have a smartphone, the Bible2020 app will give you a short bible reading each day (from the Scottish Bible Society)
- Scripture Union daily bible readings can be found at <https://content.scriptureunion.org.uk/wordlive>
- The Church of Scotland website has prayers and reflections from the Moderator and details of lots of on-line streamed church services - <https://www.churchofscotland.org.uk/>
- Claremont Church in East Kilbride are making services available over a phone line: here are the contact details which you can share with people who are not on line: **Sunday Services @ 10:30 - same details every week** 020 3937 2973; PIN: 352 598 857#

DAILY BIBLE STUDY MATERIALS - New issues of “**Every Day with Jesus**” Booklet for September and October 2020 are now available. Please contact Ian Aitken who will be delighted to arrange copies. Other Bible Study materials are also available with Michael Merriman. **Let the Bible feed you.**

Shoeboxes – we’ve said already that we won’t be making shoeboxes up this year; the way in which we do it is just not possible given the Covid restrictions. However, we would encourage you to donate the money you might have spent on shoebox material to Blythswood and Jean Dewar is happy to act as the channel for your donations, either in cash or by cheque. You can also donate online at <https://blythswood.org/donate-to-shoe-box-appeal/> Margaret Black in Balerno is sending some shoeboxes and Tillie Boulogne has some leaflets, though you would really need to make up a whole box by yourself.



Imitators and influencers

These resources are designed to help you explore the Bible as a family together at home while we can't go to church. Be as creative as you want to be and enjoy spending time with each other and with God.

Prepare yourself...

May the grace of God be among us,
and the peace of God be on our hearts.
Amen.



Play together...

Mirrors – for this game sit opposite a person. Now copy everything they do as if you were their reflection in a mirror. Then swap over. Did you prefer being the mover or the reflection? Why?

Question...

Who is your role model? Who has been a positive influence in your life? Who do you look up to and why?



Read the Bible...

Today's verses are found in 1 Thessalonians 1:1-10. You can read them in a Bible or find them here: <https://www.biblegateway.com/passage/?search=1+Thess+1&version=NIRV>

You could try reading the verses in different versions to see if it adds to your understanding of the passage.

Talk together...



Paul writes to the Thessalonians encouraging them to be a good example to others. As Christians we are to be imitators of Jesus, and also influencers who encourage others to come to God.

- How might the Thessalonians have felt being told they were chosen by God?
- We are each chosen by God too, how does that make us feel?
- Who has been a good example of faith to you?
- Who are or could you be a good example to? Siblings, friends, classmates?
- How do/would you feel if someone saw you as an influencer?
- What makes a good influencer or someone worth imitating?

Praise together...



City on a hill by Nick and Becky Drake:
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ITEadEftdnM>

Play together...

Charades – Act out an activity for the others to guess. Here are some examples:
<https://www.rootsontheweb.com/media/21180/acting-out-cards.pdf>
How many can they guess in a minute?
Make sure everyone gets a turn.

Do something...

Look in a newspaper, magazine or watch the news and find out about someone who is being a positive influence now. Who are they? What are they doing that is good? Who are they influencing?

Pray together...

Sit in front of a mirror and think about these ideas:

God looks at you and loves you.

What does God want you to be?

How will people see God's love reflected in you?

How will you be a good imitator of Jesus?

How will you be a good influencer?

Share your thoughts with God. Pray that He will help you to be a good follower of Jesus and a good example to others, just like Paul and the Thessalonians were.

Make something...

Wristbands – you'll need: paper and pens, strips of plain fabric or wide ribbon, fabric pens or permanent markers, scissors.

How could you be a positive influencer? Everyone write down 3 things you would want people to notice about you – 3 things that are worth imitating.

Give everyone a strip of fabric or ribbon, long enough to fit safely round your wrist.

Write your 3 words onto your wristband and decorate it as a reminder of how you can set a good example to others.

