



Thankful for Your Model Faith

We always thank God for all of you, mentioning you in our prayers. We continually remember before our God and Father your work produced by faith, your labor prompted by love, and your endurance inspired by hope in our Lord Jesus Christ.

For we know, brothers loved by God, that he has chosen you, 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. 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. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. 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, 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, and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath. (1 Thessalonians 1:2-10)

Generally speaking there are two kinds of learning: learning by conceptualizing and learning by experience. To be sure each one has its particular place, but whether it's shooting a free throw, baking cookies, or playing the piano, there are so many life skills that we can only learn or learn best by imitation, and once we've got that skill mastered, we ourselves can be models for others. In the opening words of his letter, Paul expresses his thanks to God for the modeling chain that the Holy Spirit had brought about for and through the Thessalonians.

Paul and his missionary companions had come to Thessalonica with the message about Jesus, who had been rejected and suffered and died and rose again to take away their sins and redeem them from the empty idolatry they'd known. Such was the difficult path our Savior trod for us, and by their example, Paul and his friends showed that faithfully following Christ also means being persecuted ourselves.

Soon after their arrival in Thessalonica the situation turned hostile. The Jews started a riot and had Paul and Silas ejected from the city, leaving behind a congregation that was a social and political target, and yet despite all these hardships and pressures, the Thessalonians didn't fold up, instead they stood up and imitated the apostles and the Lord. What gave them this tenacious attitude? It was the Word they had heard that had come to them with the power and joy worked by the Holy Spirit. Through faith in Jesus, they now knew the true and living God. So they gladly endured the temporary abuse of people because upon his return Jesus would save them from the righteous anger of God. And in the meantime the Thessalonians themselves became a model of patient endurance for all the other churches in Achaia (southern Greece) and Macedonia (northern Greece) and were obviously a source of great encouragement for Paul as well.

This Word of God prompts each of us to personally consider two things: 1.) Who has been a model of Christian living for me, whereby the Spirit inspired me to say, "With God's help I can do the same"? Join Paul in thanking God for them and perhaps sending them a note to express your thanks and encourage them. 2.) We too are models. Plenty of people are watching to see if having Christ in our lives will really change how you and I respond to challenges, disappointments, and

loss. Knowing that God is using us to be models of grace, love, and hope gives new meaning to our hardships. They are all part of God's grand plan to make the gospel ring out from us in word and in action.

Prayer: Dear Jesus, while we wait for your return, we thank you for all the fellow-believers whom you have used to show us what living faith looks like. At all times keep us humble and mindful that we too are models for others. Give us power and joy and endurance through your Spirit so you may be glorified in all we do. Amen.