



# 61A PENTECOST 20A - BIBLE STUDY

## Imitators and influencers

### Abstract

For we know, brothers and sisters 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 deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. Your faith in God has become known everywhere.

1 Thessalonians 1:4–8

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## 61A Pentecost 20A - Bible Study

### Imitators and influencers

Sunday, October 18, 2020 | After Pentecost | Proper 24 | Year A

*Old Testament & Psalm, Option I*

*Old Testament* Exodus 33:12–23

*Psalm* Psalm 99

or

*Old Testament & Psalm, Option II*

*Old Testament* Isaiah 45:1–7

*Psalm* Psalm 96:1–9 (10–13)

*New Testament* 1 Thessalonians 1:1–10

*Gospel* Matthew 22:15–22

### 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

Paul and his companions gratefully greet those who responded joyfully to their gospel message. The Holy Spirit empowered the proclaiming and receiving of the word, and the faith, hope and love at work in the community are already inspiring others who hear of them.

**This week's resources explore:** living a life worth imitating.

## Welcome and opening prayer

### A prayer of praise

We praise you, Lord,

for witnesses through the ages who have told your story  
and made you real to the next generation.

We thank you for people whose names are well known and prominent,  
and we thank you for those whose names are long lost in the annals of history  
but who are known to you.

We praise you for all whose good Christian lives  
have impacted on who we are, and what we are, and where we are.

We praise you that in every generation  
there are witnesses who stand out, who stand up to be counted,  
who make a difference to the Christian path.

We praise you, Lord God, Father, Son and Holy Spirit,  
that we have been brought by word, by deed, by action to follow you.

Amen.

## Present the New Testament: Paul talks to Silvanus about Thessalonica

A drama for three people

Use this drama to introduce Paul's oldest surviving letter.

It imagines a conversation in which Paul gives Silvanus background information about Thessalonica, and an account of his interaction with the people there, shortly before writing the letter. You will need three actors.

**Silvanus:** So Paul, tell me about Thessalonica.

**Paul:** Well, Silvanus. It was founded a long time ago by the King of Macedon. He called it after his wife. It's a busy commercial city on the Aegean Sea and on the great trade route to the East. The Romans recognised its importance and made it the capital of their province of Macedon. There are some very rich people there but also a lot more people who are extremely poor.

**Silvanus:** Is it a Christian city?

**Paul:** Well, I wouldn't say that but there is a Christian community there. There's also Jews, followers of the Greek gods, the Roman gods, the Egyptian gods. In fact, you name it – they'll probably worship it!

**Silvanus:** And why did you visit Thessalonica?

**Paul:** Silas, Timothy and I had a bad time in Philippi as I told you and so we left there and headed west along the Via Egnatia and so we came to Thessalonica.

**Silvanus:** And you met the Christian community there?

**Paul:** Not exactly. First of all, we preached in the synagogue but then we got talking to other people. We told them about Jesus; about how he lived; and how, about 20 years ago, he died and rose again; about how that shows how much God loves us and...

**Silvanus:** They became Christians.

**Paul:** They became Christians.

*Enter Timothy*

**Paul:** Timothy, my dear Timothy, welcome. It is good to see you. Grace and peace be with you.

**Timothy:** Grace and peace be with you, Paul. And grace and peace be with you, Silvanus.

**Silvanus:** Grace and peace, Timothy.

**Paul:** So, tell us, how are things in Thessalonica?

**Timothy:** Well they were pleased to see me, but they are missing you enormously. They have been through quite a rough time and several people have died, which worries them because they kept asking whether it means that because they died before Jesus came again, they won't get to heaven. I did my best to encourage them but...

**Silvanus:** Why don't we send them a letter? It could be read out to them at their meeting.

**Paul:** That's a fantastic idea. Let's start right away.

**Timothy:** How shall we begin?

**Silvanus:** How about Dear Thessalonian Christians?

**Paul:** No. Let's begin like this (*read 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10*).

## Reading

### 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.

<sup>2</sup>We always thank God for all of you and continually mention you in our prayers. <sup>3</sup>We 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.

<sup>4</sup>For we know, brothers and sisters loved by God, that he has chosen you, <sup>5</sup>because our gospel came to you not simply with words but also with power, with the Holy Spirit and deep conviction. You know how we lived among you for your sake. <sup>6</sup>You became imitators of us and of the Lord, for you welcomed the message in the midst of severe suffering with the joy given by the Holy Spirit. <sup>7</sup>And so you became a model to all the believers in Macedonia and Achaia. <sup>8</sup>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, <sup>9</sup>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, <sup>10</sup>and to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead—Jesus, who rescues us from the coming wrath.

*respond*

For the word of the Lord

**Thanks be to God**

## Exegesis

New Testament 1 Thessalonians 1.1-10

'Paul, Silvanus, and Timothy' worked together, travelling from Lystra in central Turkey to Thessalonica and Beroea, in northern Greece (Acts 16.1–17.14). Their letter is to the church (*ekklēsia*, at this stage probably meaning simply 'assembly', as in Acts 19.32,39-41). 'Of the Thessalonians', rather than 'in Thessalonica', is unusual. A current coin had Julius Caesar's head and 'God' on one side and Augustus' head and 'of the Thessalonians' on the other. But our Thessalonians owe their identity not to Rome but to 'God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ'. Already in this earliest Christian writing, a mere 20 years after the crucifixion, naming Jesus as Lord and God as Father belong intimately together.

Acts says the apostles preached in the synagogue, persuading Jews and their Greek adherents, but the letter suggests the community they established was entirely Gentile, since they 'turned to God from idols'. Jewish Scripture is not quoted, nor are issues of concern to Jewish Christians (e.g. the Law) discussed. The apostles rejoice that the Holy Spirit that empowered them now works in the Thessalonians' faith and love, sustained by their hope of Jesus' return. Imitating the apostles and the Lord – whose faith, hope and love were not conquered by death – they become examples for others. At this stage, the faithful were themselves the only gospel that could be read.

## Picture Pointers

- How aware are you of the influencers in your life?
- How would you feel if someone saw you as an influencer?
- How can your church community develop an ethos which is worth imitating in your own life?



## Live your faith

Every time you post something on social media, ask yourself whether it will have a good, bad or neutral influence.

## End the session (5 mins)

### A sending out prayer

Into a world of confusion and disbelief,  
into a world of welcome and rejection,  
we take the grace of God that has been among us,  
and the peace of God that has been on our hearts.  
Amen.