

## 1 Thessalonians 1 (7-8) – You Became an Example

You are an example to others. Everyone is a role model of some sort, whether they want to be or not. People are watching and learning from your example. Even if you're absent. Think about that. Children learn by watching adults. And by watching other children their age and a little older. And just as children learn what you live, younger believers are learning how they should live by watching how you live, and what you do. Or don't do.

Now, you may not want to be an example. Or you may not think you're much of an example. And you may want to escape being an example. But you might as well embrace being an example. Because when you became a Christian, you became an example. You cannot escape it. And you cannot evade it, because absence and avoidance are still an example.

This isn't about perfection; it is about direction. And even when you've taken steps back, you can be an example of how to take steps forward. Praise God, I don't want to discourage you today, I want to encourage you today.

The Thessalonians were idolaters who became imitators, and then they became the imitated. They followed Paul's example of Christ and became examples themselves. That is discipleship. And that is a process. All Christian disciples are in a process. And becoming a good example isn't about reaching some pinnacle point. A good example is someone who is growing. Or getting back up again. We need forward moving disciples on all parts of the path. You become good examples as you grow.

This is what Paul told Timothy in 1 Timothy 4:15-16 – *Practice these things, immerse yourself in them, so that all may see your progress. Keep a close watch on yourself and on the teaching. Persist in this, for by so doing you will save both yourself and your hearers.* That holds true for you, too. Being a good example helps others to stay out of trouble. Following good examples helps you stay out of trouble. You don't graduate out of this process. Being and following good examples is crucial for your discipleship. No matter who you are.

And that is what the Thessalonians were doing. And becoming. In 1 Thessalonians 1:6-10, the Apostle Paul discusses what he has seen and heard about the Thessalonians. And he gives them several lines of evidence that demonstrate why Paul knew that God had saved them.

In vs.6, we saw the first two evidences. The first evidence of salvation is community. Paul says, *“And you became imitators of us and of the Lord.”* Walking with Jesus means walking with others who walk with Jesus.

The second evidence was perseverance. Paul says, *“for you received the word in much affliction, with the joy of the Holy Spirit.”* Clinging to God in faith, and the power of God to give you joy in Jesus in hard situations, this is another evidence of salvation. You walk the hard, narrow road with others.

You see more lines of evidence in vs.7 – *so that you became an example.* This is living as a witness. And this is growth. They had become imitators of faithful believers, and now they had become examples of faithful believers. This is what I like to call the “discipleship chain.” Disciples produce disciples. Disciples follow other disciples which develops disciples.

Through affliction God uses the believer as a powerful witness. Paul knew they were chosen by God because the Holy Spirit had worked conviction to stay the course, and gave them joy even in affliction. And this made them a powerful witness to the worth of Jesus. They had assurance and growth and joy in afflictions. Paul was suffering, and so were the Thessalonians – they followed the Lord and the example of Paul and became examples themselves. Jesus is the one who makes your life a witness.

*to all the believers in Macedonia and in Achaia* – in other words, all of Greece. It was obvious that the Thessalonians had truly believed the Gospel. No one had to ask, their lives spoke the truth they believed. They lived out what they said they believed in. And when you do that, your actions give weight to your words. Living as an example of faith, as a witness to the worth of Jesus, in a way that is vibrant, and growing, this is more evidence of salvation.

You are an example to others. And people learn from your example. What kind of values you have. What kind of goals you have. What kind of things you allow or don't allow. What you do with your time. What you do with your money. What you do when things aren't going right for you. People may not even realize that they are learning from others. But they are.

Of course, there are all sorts of Christians on a spectrum of good and not as good examples. But you can improve. We should not only strive to be good role models, but strive to help others see and follow good role models. This is why I am so consistently insistent on promoting those who teach good doctrine, and warning against those who teach bad or false doctrine.

I "worry" like a parent who doesn't want their child hanging around the wrong crowd. Of course, you want to train your children up in such a way that they know the difference for themselves. Still, even then, you want to nurture and protect those in your care. And doctrine is only part of the equation. Practice is also a big component. You want to have both good doctrine and good practice in your life. And people need to see both. The New Testament teaches us to follow those who are teaching and living right (Philippians 3:17). You are leading people; where are you leading them?

What kind of example are you? Do people know that you know your Bible? Do people ask you to pray? Do you talk to others about Jesus? Can others come to you for wisdom? You may be young in the faith, but are you growing? And if people follow you, will they grow? And when trials come, when things don't go the way you wanted, when you're tired and frustrated, when you suffer affliction, what do people see? How do you react, respond, repent, renew? Do you make excuses, or are you a good example?

This isn't about everyone liking you. Don't worry about disrespect from people you ought not to respect. Don't worry about criticism from those you wouldn't ask for advice. Here is the issue: Do people see in you what Paul saw in the Thessalonians? Do you exhibit faith, full conviction, community, perseverance, and joy in the Holy Spirit? If not, why not? And what now?

Well, you can learn, you can grow, you can improve. And you can turn to God in repentance and faith. So that, even when you're not really doing so well, you can show yourself to be a good example of how to get better. People need to see good examples of what repentance really looks like. Repentance means you turn around. You get back up after falling down.

The Thessalonians had heard about Jesus from Paul. Then they began to follow Jesus, after the manner of Paul, Silas, and Timothy. Then they became examples to others, just as Paul had been an example to them. They were hearers of the word, then they were doers of the word, and their lives became teachers of the word. And from among those people who had followed this pattern, pastors, teachers, elders, deacons, and leaders would emerge.

Let's apply this to you. This isn't about perfection; it is about direction. This is about a pattern for your practice. And we see this same pattern with Ezra the scribe and priest. He served the Jewish people during their exile in Babylon and as they returned to Jerusalem. And his religious leadership helped generate a revival as they resettled the land.

Notice the pattern in Ezra 7:8-10 – *And Ezra came to Jerusalem in the fifth month, which was in the seventh year of the king. For on the first day of the first month he began to go up from Babylonia, and on the first day of the fifth month he came to Jerusalem, for the good hand of his God was on him. For Ezra had set his heart to study the Law of the LORD, and to do it and to teach his statutes and rules in Israel.* Study, do, teach – You learn the faith, then you live the faith, and then you are a lesson in the faith, and you can teach lessons in the faith.

Think of what Paul is saying about the Thessalonians here. He was not only saying that the Thessalonians had become an example to others of faithfully following Jesus. He was also saying that they had become a model for other churches to follow. Paul mentions them as a model again a few years later. In 2 Corinthians 8, Paul mentions Macedonia (which included Thessalonica) as an example to the Corinthian church of good stewardship and sacrificial giving. This was a fledgling church with no mature leadership when they

started, in a region dominated by paganism. They weren't perfect, but they were heading in the right direction. Repentance means you turn around.

Vs.8 – *For not only has the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia, but your faith in God has gone forth everywhere, so that we need not say anything.* The Thessalonians had become an example of persevering in the faith with joy despite affliction (vs.6-7). But they didn't just "hold on" to their faith. They actively spread the faith (*the word of the Lord sounded forth from you in Macedonia and Achaia*). Here is another line of evidence; the Thessalonians had become enthusiastically evangelistic.

This phrase "sounded forth" is a strong compound word in Greek which means a bold proclamation. It is a strengthened form of a weaker verb from which we get our word echo. Their bold witness was stronger than an echo, it was like a trumpet blast or loud thunder. The Thessalonians were boldly proclaiming the truth of Jesus to everyone they encountered! They were trumpeting the Good News of the Gospel all over Greece.

And beyond the borders (*your faith in God has gone forth everywhere*). Perhaps some of the Thessalonians had traveled outside of Greece. But the trade routes through Thessalonica meant that these believers were telling people about Jesus and their faith about THE faith was spreading out all over. They were talking about the faith, and other people were talking about them.

I pray that our church and our people will be known as faithful examples. I pray that you and I will be faithful examples. And let's put legs to our prayers. Whether it is in the world, on the job, at the school, or with the church, people are watching you. So, what you must do is watch Jesus. And as you do, you'll walk with him. And you'll be a good example. Even when people say bad things about you because you follow Jesus. Make no mistake about it, Jesus said that would happen. Paul told Timothy it would happen. And other Christians need to see what to do when people who don't know Jesus treat those who do know Jesus badly. You need to keep on living like Jesus is good, even when your situation is bad. Amen.

You know, people often pray, "God, use me." Well, he is using you, the Bible makes that abundantly clear. When you became a Christian, you became an example. God IS using you. You get to really know God by really getting into what God is already doing. Instead of waiting for God to do some big thing first. Stop dreaming about being a celebrity Christian influencer, and start being a godly influence. You don't need to reach millions of people who won't really know you. You need to reach the many who do know you.

I am not telling you not to dream big. I am saying you aren't dreaming big enough! You see, the biggest dream is God's dream. But God's dream isn't really a dream like we think of it. His dream isn't a hope, or wish. It's a continuing reality. And if you want to do this thing right, if you want to be a good, godly example, you need to make God's dream your dream. And God's dream for you is happening right now. God is using you right where you are. Wherever you are. Whenever you are. However you are.

In this life, your future is right now. You don't need to be big to be built. Big is what God says, how God sees, not how we see. Walk by faith, not by sight. People want God to do something big for them so that they can do something big for God. But they have the wrong measure. God is interested in quality, not quantity. Be interested in quality, and God will take care of the quantity. And it isn't that if you have good quality that God will increase your quantity. This isn't about increasing the size and scope of your influence for God. This is about increasing the depth of God's influence on you.

Your life can be a witness to the worth of Jesus. Not because everything always goes good for you. But because your life proclaims your faith that Jesus is worth it no matter what is going on with you.

Let's set an example, and come to pray about it, right here, and right now.

Heavenly Father, I pray that my life would be a good example. That it would point to Christ, and lead people to him. That my witness would sound forth to your glory no matter what situation I am in. In Jesus' name, amen.