

Imitators and influencers

Notes on the Bible readings

- 1 Thessalonians is the oldest book in the New Testament, written less than 20 years after the crucifixion. The church of Thessalonica would have been a new Christian community and the letter addresses their concerns that Paul has not been back to see them. The Thessalonians have a positive reputation and perhaps were seen as the influencers of their day, being early adopters of the Christian faith and imitators of Paul.

- We read that they were persecuted, but still they 'received the word with joy'. At this stage there would have been no written Gospels; instead, these early Christians would have been 'living' gospels, living out a life of hope and love, proclaiming the gospel through their lives.

In our society we can read both negative and positive stories about the actions of Christians. This shines a light, perhaps uncomfortably, on our own lives when thinking about our choices, actions and responses. How can we be a positive influence for our friends, family, communities and society as a whole?

What makes you, you?

The mathematician and code-breaker Alan Turing endeavoured to make a machine with artificial intelligence. That is, he wanted his machine to imitate human responses – hence the name of the film *The Imitation Game*, based on his life. How would it feel to have a machine programmed to imitate you. What do you think it would do? What would you be proud of it being able to do?

Questions for reflection

- ▶ 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?



A prayer for others

Lord God, in our corner of the world it isn't easy to really feel the pain of persecution for our faith, but we know that it happens. We pray for those who are persecuted and punished, violated and scarred because of their faith. We pray for those who despite these things speak out and speak up, and witness to you, the living God. We pray for the families of these people that they may be given strength and support in their own faith and discipleship. We pray for those who teach us of you, who unpack your truths, who explain what living a Christian life is and how to follow you. We pray for those who guide us in times of struggles with our faith, those who stand by us in times of denial and bewilderment. We pray for those who are dying in the faith, and those who are struggling to find their faith before they die. For these and all your witnesses, Lord, we pray. Amen.

A prayer for the world

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

A personal prayer

Lord Jesus, in my quiet moments, may I offer my innermost desires and yearnings to you, that I may more and more walk my path in life conscious of you being at my side. Amen.

Live your faith

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