

CHRIST-ianity Starts With Christ

...Yet We Resist Becoming Like Him

Yves Perriard – June 2025

“Be perfect like your heavenly Father is perfect”

“In all things, extremes are rare, average things are very common.” — *Plato*

If we truly long to see the restoration of the early church in our time, we must begin not with its structures or traditions, but with its center: **Jesus Christ Himself**.

This seems so self-evident that one wonders why it must even be said. And yet, churches and believers across generations have often sought to restore the *effect* of the early church by imitating models — whether from the Book of Acts or from influential movements in history — while failing to return to the *source*.

The question that should shape every church and every disciple is painfully simple:
What would our lives, and our communities, look like if we all truly sought to become like Jesus — today?

Too often, Jesus is admired as the foundation, but rarely modeled as the blueprint. Instead, we seek inspiration from the apostles, or from great leaders¹ and churches² of the past. But no model³ — no matter how faithful or fruitful — can replace the **Model Himself**. The Gospels, not just Acts and the Epistles, were the foundation of the early church. And they must be ours again today.

I recall my time in a denomination that was passionate about restoring New Testament Christianity. Most of the examples and sermons focused on the practices of Acts or the Epistles. It was as if the early Christians were more imitable than the Christ they followed. Over time, I developed what I now call the “*Jesus Deficit Disorder*” — an unconscious neglect of the Gospels

¹ Paul wrote to Corinthians that they should imitate him as he imitated Jesus (1 Cor.11:1) or Thessalonians that they became imitators of Paul’s team *and* of the Lord (1Thess.1:6)

² The whole message of the first and second chapter of Thessalonians is about being living models to imitate

³ Phil.3:17 and 1 Cor.4:16 and

in favor of “restoration” through secondhand models. It is as if we hoped to reach the summit without beginning at the base.

The truth is unavoidable: if we want to restore the early church, we must restore **Jesus**. And if we want to restore Jesus, we must take seriously the call to become like Him — not only in *character*, but in *everything*.

What Does It Mean to Imitate Jesus?

Most Christians will agree that “God became man so that man might become like God⁴” not in divine essence, of course, but in character and intimacy⁵. We all affirm that we should cultivate Christlike patience, purity, love, and humility. But the point of divergence comes here:

Should we stop at character? Or should we also imitate His radical lifestyle?

- ⇒ Should we seek to live with the same awareness of the Holy Spirit that Jesus did?
- ⇒ Should we aim to walk in the same faith that healed the sick and fed the multitudes?
- ⇒ Should we disciple others with the same personal investment?
- ⇒ Should we confront injustice, serve the broken, and challenge systems as boldly as He did?

In short: **Do we want to imitate Jesus fully — or only safely?**

This question will shape the entire course of our Christian lives. And my conviction is clear: **we should try — and try with all our hearts**. Because the pursuit of Christ’s *life* will inevitably shape our *character*. But the reverse is not guaranteed.

You can be moral, kind, and religious — and still never resemble Jesus. But if you seek to live fully like Jesus, you will be **forced to change everything**.

It’s like an athlete who wants to play at the professional level. Casual training will not suffice. The pursuit of greatness demands discipline, transformation, and sacrifice. The same is true with Jesus. If you aim to live as He lived, your life will be tested — but it will also be enlarged.

⁴ St. Athanasius of Alexandria: *On the Incarnation* 54:3, PG 25:192B

⁵ St Irenaeus explained this doctrine in *Against Heresies*, Book 5, in the Preface, “the Word of God, our Lord Jesus Christ, who did, through his transcendent love, become what we are, that He might bring us to be even what He is Himself.”

Three Arguments Against Total Imitation — And Why They Fall Short

Argument 1: “Striving for perfection is frustrating. Better to focus on your strengths.”

A leader from a very large denomination once told me that “To strive to become perfect like Christ eventually leads to frustration. Instead, we should focus on our strengths and accept our limitations, this is how we have peace and productivity.” Is this true? My answer is:

“His process may be valid, but his conclusion is not.”

It is never wrong to build from your strengths — but it is a mistake to believe that full imitation of Christ is beyond reach. With God, all things are possible. We may never attain perfection in this life, but we are called to pursue it — because **the pursuit itself reshapes us** ⁶

Think of a piece of metal placed into fire. The metal remains what it is, but as it takes on the glow, the heat, and the properties of the flame it slowly changes. Likewise, we have a sinful nature — but in Christ, we can change and become radiant with His presence. And the limit is not God's ability, but our willingness.

That said, transformation does not mean fixating on what we lack. It is indeed far more effective to cultivate the strengths God has already planted in us. The parable of the talents teaches us that when we are faithful with what we have, God multiplies it. ⁷

The apostles were not static. They grew. They changed. They failed, repented, and rose again. What they became was not just the result of calling — it was the result of a passionate pursuit.

And that invitation is still open to us.

Argument 2: “We all have different gifts and situations. We must accept our limitations.”

It's true:⁸ We are not all the same.⁹ One excels in logic, another in art. Some are introverts, some leaders, some servants. But these natural differences should never be used to limit our desire to become like Jesus.¹⁰

⁶ 2 Cor. 3:18

⁷ Matthew 25:14-30 and Luke 19:12-27.

⁸ Mostly from 1 Cor. 12:29-30

⁹ Paul asked “Are all apostles? Are all prophets? etc. implying that we are all at different levels of influence

¹⁰ 1 Cor. 12:27-31 teaches BOTH about having the humility in the fact that we are all different, and yet about having a zeal to eagerly desire the greater gifts

Because **the life of Jesus is not built on rare talent — it's built on radical surrender.**

Interestingly, Jesus did not display unreachable genius. He wasn't known for His IQ, His music, or His athleticism. He showed us something far more imitable: *love, faith, obedience, power, and intimacy with the Father.*

These are gifts that **anyone can grow in**, if they want them.

You may never be Einstein or Mozart — but you can be like Jesus.

Paul tells us to “*eagerly **DESIRE** the greater gifts.*”¹¹ That command assumes possibility. It means we are not meant to settle.¹² We are meant to reach perfection¹³ and to imitate God¹⁴ Himself. Every spiritual and even supernatural gift is available¹⁵—not by merit, but by hunger.

In my own journey, I started with nothing. No confidence, no charisma, no ministry skill. But as I desired to become like Jesus, I began to ask — and God began to answer. Each gift opened the door to another. And the desire never faded. This is what Paul wrote with such a passion that

*“I want to know Him, and his suffering and the power of His resurrection...”*¹⁶

What limits us is not our design — it's our lack of desire.¹⁷

Argument 3: “Isn't it okay to not want the radical life of Jesus?”

It's not *bad* to want a normal life. Not everyone is called to preach, to plant churches, or to live in radical faith. There is no shame in working a stable job, raising a family, and living quietly.

But the call of Jesus isn't about choosing between good and bad.

It's about choosing between **good and best.**

Jesus lived a life few would dare to imitate. He confronted power, healed the lepers, suffered rejection, and laid Himself down completely. It's no surprise that most people — even Christians — hesitate to follow Him that far.

¹¹ 1 Cor.12:31 and 1 Cor.14:1

¹² The Greek verb translated by “eagerly desire” can be translated as well as “be zealous”

¹³ Matt. 5:48

¹⁴ 2 Pet. 1:3

¹⁵ Eph.5:1, 1 Pet.2:21, Rom.8:29 and particularly the third chapter of Philippians invite us to the utmost life

¹⁶ Phil. 3:13

¹⁷ Philippians 2:13 =God creates desires and yet 1 Cor.12:31, 14:1+12 calls us to desire his desires!

But we should not discourage those who do.

If someone wants to follow Jesus all the way — in word, in deed, in power, in suffering — then the church should do everything possible to support them. Because while the world has plenty of normal lives, it desperately needs more Christlike ones.

The Final Challenge

Becoming like Jesus is the most personal, humbling, and liberating journey on earth. But it is not without cost. It demands three convictions:

1. **You are alone before God.**

No one else can run this race for you. You must want it — deeply — and pursue it fiercely. You may feel alone at times, but you are never unseen.

2. **You are not above others.**

There is no place for arrogance. If Jesus is your standard, there will always be more growing to do. If others follow your example¹⁸ let it be with humility and tears, not pride.

3. **You are not beneath others.**

Don't compare. Don't excuse yourself because others seem "more spiritual." If someone reflects Jesus more clearly, imitate what is good in them — and press on.

Let us all become like the most spiritually gifted person in the world, our Lord Jesus. As Longfellow wrote: "'Lives of great men all remind us we can make our lives sublime and, in passing, leave behind us footprints in the sands of time'"¹⁹.

So What Does It Mean to Live the Life of Jesus?

Some believe the Christian life is about happiness — a life free from pain, conflict, and difficulty. And while it's true that Jesus came to deliver us from evil and bring heaven near, happiness is not the final goal. **Christlikeness is.**

To become like Jesus — in heart, in mission, and in power — is the highest purpose of our existence. It is a path that few choose, because it demands everything. And yet, it is the

¹⁸ 1 Cor. 4:16, 11:1; Phil. 3:17, 4:9; 1 Thess. 1:6, 2 Thess. 3:9

¹⁹ Henry Longfellow – A Psalm of Life

greatest life one can ever live. A life of eternal worth. A life of joy beyond comfort. A life of courage, fruitfulness, and glory.

This calling touches three inseparable areas:

1. **His character** — to reflect His love, purity, wisdom, and endurance
2. **His discipleship** — to love, train, and multiply others as He did
3. **His power** — to walk in the gifts of the Spirit that heal, deliver, and restore

Most settle for the first. Few embrace the second. Rarer still are those who desire the third. But if we are to truly reflect God in this world, we must pursue all three.

This is the essence of the Christian life. This is what Jesus invites us into. And this is why this article was written:

To remind us that Church and Christianity does not begin with us — **it begins with Christ.** And it ends with becoming like Him.