Why Christian Formation Matters for Everyone Who Follows Jesus

Key Scripture:
"For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers."- Romans 8:29

Following Jesus Is About Who We Are Becoming
When Jesus called His first disciples, His invitation was simple: *"Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men."* - Matthew 4:19 Jesus did not merely invite them to believe certain things about Him. He invited them into a life with Him. They walked with Jesus. They listened to Him teach. They watched Him pray. They saw how He treated people, responded to opposition, loved His enemies, and trusted His Father.

And as they spent time with Jesus, being with Him began changing them. That is at the heart of Christian formation. **Christian formation is the lifelong work of God through which our thoughts, desires, habits, relationships, and actions are increasingly formed into the likeness of Jesus. The goal of following Jesus is not simply to know more about Him, but to become more like Him.**

Everyone Is Being Formed
Whether we realize it or not, something is always shaping us.
Our families shape us. | Our experiences shape us. | Our culture shapes us. | Our relationships shape us. | Our entertainment shapes us. | Our habits shape us. | Our fears and ambitions shape us.

The question is not: **"**Am I being formed?**"** The question is: **"**What am I being formed into?**"**
Paul writes: *"Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewal of your mind."*- Romans 12:2 *If we are not intentionally allowing Christ to form us, we should not assume we will remain spiritually neutral.* Other influences will gladly shape our desires, priorities, and understanding of what makes a good life. **Christian formation means intentionally placing our lives under the influence of Jesus.**

Jesus Wants More Than Our Agreement
It is possible to agree with Jesus without becoming like Jesus.
We can know Scripture and still be prideful. | We can attend church and remain unforgiving. | We can believe the right things while still being controlled by anger, fear, greed, or the approval of others.

Jesus said: *"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock."* - Matthew 7:24 **Christian formation is where the truth we believe increasingly becomes the life we live.** So the question moves beyond: **"**Do I believe what Jesus taught?**"** to: **"***Is what Jesus taught becoming true in me?***"**

The Goal Is Christlikeness
Paul describes God's purpose for us as being: *"conformed to the image of his Son."* - Romans 8:29
And in Galatians he writes: *"My little children, for whom I am again in the anguish of childbirth until Christ is formed in you!"*- Galatians 4:19 That is the goal: ***Christ formed in us.*** → The patience of Jesus becoming visible in us. | The compassion of Jesus shaping how we see people. | The humility of Jesus reshaping our ambitions. | The courage of Jesus changing how we respond to fear. | The forgiveness of Jesus transforming our relationships. | The love of Jesus becoming increasingly natural to us.

Christlikeness is not an optional pursuit for unusually devoted Christians. It is God's intention for every follower of Jesus.

Formation Happens Through Relationship With Jesus
Christian formation is not simply Christian self-improvement. Jesus did not say, "Try harder until you become like Me." He said: *"Abide in me, and I in you."* - John 15:4

A branch does not produce fruit through determination. It produces fruit because it remains connected to the vine. This helps us understand spiritual practices differently.

Prayer, Scripture, worship, fasting, silence, generosity, service, and Christian community are not ways of earning God's approval. They are ways we intentionally make room in our lives to **be with Jesus, listen to Jesus, trust Jesus, and learn to live like Jesus.** **The practices themselves do not transform us. God transforms us as we continually offer ourselves to Him.**

Formation Changes What Comes Out of Us
Jesus said: *"For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks."*- Matthew 12:34
Eventually, what has been formed inside of us comes out.
Pressure reveals it. | Conflict reveals it. | Disappointment reveals it. | Success reveals it. | Exhaustion reveals it.

Christian formation therefore goes deeper than learning how to act like Jesus when people are watching. Jesus wants to transform the heart from which our actions flow.

The goal is not simply to control our anger but to become people of peace. | Not simply to force ourselves to forgive but to become people shaped by grace. | Not simply to perform acts of generosity but to become generous people.

We Train for the Life of Jesus
Paul tells Timothy: *"Train yourself for godliness."* - 1 Timothy 4:7

There is a difference between trying and training. A person cannot decide to run a marathon tomorrow simply by trying harder. The ability to run the race is developed through training. The same is true spiritually. We often wait until temptation, conflict, suffering, or crisis arrives and then try to suddenly respond like Jesus.

Christian formation asks a different question: What kind of person am I becoming before that moment arrives?
Prayer trains us to depend on God. | **Scripture** trains our minds to recognize truth. | **Fasting** exposes desires that may control us. | **Generosity** loosens the grip of possessions. | **Silence** teaches us to listen. |**Community** teaches us patience, forgiveness, and love. | **Service** trains us away from self-centeredness.
We do not practice these things to make God love us. ***We practice them because God already loves us and is teaching us how to live like Jesus.***

Who Are You Becoming?
Imagine yourself five years from today. Between now and then, you will live thousands of ordinary days filled with conversations, decisions, habits, thoughts, relationships, and opportunities to practice the way of Jesus. Who are those ordinary days turning you into? That may be one of the most important questions a follower of Jesus can ask. Following Jesus is not merely about where we are going someday. It is about who we are becoming today.

Paul writes: *"And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another."* - 2 Corinthians 3:18
We behold Christ. | We remain with Christ. | We practice the way of Christ. | And through the work of the Holy Spirit, we increasingly become like Christ.

Discussion Questions
For Adults
1. What comes out of you under pressure?
2. Where can you see evidence of Christ forming you?
3. What area of your life currently looks least like Jesus?
4. Which spiritual practice might help you become more attentive and available to God's work in that area?

For Children
1. Who are some people you spend a lot of time with? How can spending time with someone make you more like them?
2. What are some things Jesus did that you would like to become better at doing?
3. When you're angry or don't get what you want, what is one way you could respond more like Jesus?
4. What are some ways we can spend time with Jesus and learn from Him this week?