

Is Jesus a Role Model Whom We Can Imitate?

By Anand Peter

It is a paradox: nearly everyone is willing to acknowledge Jesus as a worthy role model, but almost no one seriously believes it is possible to live up to His example. Our esteem for His life of obedience to the Father, and our desire to be "just like Jesus," does battle with the deep-seated notion that it is impossible to be like Him. Who would choose a mentor who is impossible to imitate? We often hear people say, when asked to forgive an offender, "I am not Jesus."

Some passages in Scripture inspire us and fill us with confidence. Some light the fires of hope in our hearts. Other passages seem too idealistic, too fantastic to find their way into even our dreams, much less our daily lives: "For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren" (Romans 8:29). Is this possible? Does God look at each one of us and see a destiny in which we look like Jesus?

Whatever our theological understanding of this passage, we should all recognise that it speaks of God's intention for each one of us to become conformed to the likeness of His Son. Simply put, God desires to have more children like Jesus. Jesus is God's only begotten Son, but we become His sons and daughters by adoption. The destiny of those adopted into the family of God is that we, too, should bear the family likeness — that we will look just like Jesus.

If our intuition tells us that following the example of Jesus is impossible, even for a single day or an hour, how can we have the confidence to pursue His vision for us? The truth is that God has a greater vision for what is possible in our lives than we do. Perhaps the reason Paul instructs us, later in Romans, to "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Romans 12:2) is so that we can see the possibilities of a life lived in harmony with Jesus — a practical, day-to-day, moment-by-moment harmony capable of bringing the rest and peace He promises.

Let us pray that Jesus will be our leading light as we endeavour to imitate Him, with the help of the Holy Spirit, in submission, faith, and prayer. Amen.