

What Would Jesus Do? (WWJD)

by Steve McRoberts



You see this question on pins and bumper stickers: "*What Would Jesus Do (WWJD)?*"

Those who proudly pose this question usually think that there is a clear answer. They believe that any ethical dilemma they encounter in our modern age can be solved by imagining how Jesus would have handled the situation.

But how do you determine the reactions of someone who purportedly lived (and died) nearly 2 millennia ago? Christians believe that they know his character so well that this poses no problem for them. But where did they learn of the character Jesus? From the Bible.

It would seem that the best, most unbiased way of determining how Jesus would react in some modern day situation would be to find a similar incident in the Bible, and extrapolate from it. Only then could we avoid predetermined ideas about his character.

Incident One: Helping and Prejudice

Let's take the following modern day incident: You are waiting for a bus to go downtown, and while you're standing at the bus-stop, a woman of a different race comes up to you and asks you which bus to take to get downtown. Do you tell her which bus to take or not?

This seems a very simple question. With a very minimal amount of effort you could

help this person. Very few people would be so selfish as to withhold that amount of effort. But let's say that you're prejudiced against this particular race. What then?

Well, many Christians would say that prejudice is immoral, and so one would have to overcome prejudice and give the directions. That's all well and good, but:

What Would Jesus Do?

Mt:15:22: And, behold, a woman of Canaan came out of the same coasts, and cried unto him, saying, Have mercy on me, O Lord, thou Son of David; my daughter is grievously vexed with a devil.

Mt:15:23: But he answered her not a word. And his disciples came and besought him, saying, Send her away; for she crieth after us.

Mt:15:24: But he answered and said, I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel.

Mt:15:25: Then came she and worshipped him, saying, Lord, help me.

Mt:15:26: But he answered and said, It is not meet to take the children's bread, and to cast it to dogs.

Mt:15:27: And she said, Truth, Lord: yet the dogs eat of the crumbs which fall from their masters' table.

Mt:15:28: Then Jesus answered and said unto her, O woman, great is thy faith: be it unto thee even as thou wilt. And her daughter was made whole from that very hour.



First of all, let's note the similarities between this incident and our hypothetical situation. In both cases someone of a different (and despised) race asks for help. In both cases only a very few words need be said in order to provide the help.

Now, let's examine how Jesus handled the situation. Did he immediately offer his help? No, he did not. What did he do? He uttered a racial slur: calling Canaanites "dogs," and refused to help anyone not of his own race. Today, we would call this the act of a racist.

It was only when the woman agreed that Canaanites were "dogs" that Jesus agreed to help.

So, let's apply WWJD to our hypothetical situation, and see how a Christian should act:

Woman: "Do you know which bus goes downtown?"

Christian: "I do not give information to dogs."

Woman: "It's true, the people of my race are dogs."

Christian: "All right then, since you admit it: take bus 68."

Of course, it's more likely that the woman would heap abuse upon the Christian, or pull out a gun, than that she would call her people "dogs". But that would present a new ethical dilemma beyond our scope.

Incident Two: Selfishness vs. the Environment

Let's try another situation. Let's say that you are a real-estate developer. You have your eye on a wooded area on the outskirts of town. You would like to clear the land and put up a strip mall. The local environmentalist groups are in an uproar over the habitat destruction. However, you have enough clout with government officials that you can pull off the deal in spite of all protests.

WWJD?



Mt:21:18: Now in the morning as he returned into the city, he hungered.

Mt:21:19: And when he saw a fig tree in the way, he came to it, and found nothing thereon, but leaves only, and said unto it, Let no fruit grow on thee henceforward for ever. And presently the fig tree withered away.

Mt:21:20: And when the disciples saw it, they marvelled, saying, How soon is the fig tree withered away!

Mt:21:21: Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea; it shall be done.

The tree was of no use to Jesus; it was not bearing fruit when he was hungry. Therefore, he cursed it so that it withered away. In other words, he got rid of that which failed to give him what he wanted. Furthermore, he told his followers that they would be able to remove entire mountains if they so wished.

Now it is clear how we should handle our hypothetical situation. We should do as Jesus would do: we should destroy the trees, and ruin the environment (since it is

not benefiting us personally), and build our strip mall in its place.

Incident Three: Selfishness vs. Giving

You open your mail, and are pleasantly surprised to find a \$100 tax rebate! You have no pressing need for this money, and begin wondering what to do with it. Also in the mail you find a sale paper from your local department store, and an "Urgent Request" letter from UNICEF, asking for donations for starving children in some war-torn country.

The Department store is having a sale on your favorite perfume: \$99.99 for a bottle which is regularly \$129.99.

WWJD?



Mt:26:6: Now when Jesus was in Bethany, in the house of Simon the leper,
Mt:26:7: There came unto him a woman having an alabaster box of very precious ointment, and poured it on his head, as he sat at meat.
Mt:26:8: But when his disciples saw it, they had indignation, saying, To what purpose is this waste?
Mt:26:9: For this ointment might have been sold for much, and given to the poor.
Mt:26:10: When Jesus understood it, he said unto them, Why trouble ye the woman? for she hath wrought a good work upon me.
Mt:26:11: For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always.

Jesus would buy the perfume; it is only on sale this week, whereas the poor are always with us.

Incident Four: Empathy & Funeral Leave

You are an employer. In the middle of a huge advertising blitz, the father of one of your employees dies. Your employee wants to take funeral leave. You need him for your campaign.

WWJD?



Mt:8:21: And another of his disciples said unto him, Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father.

Mt:8:22: But Jesus said unto him, Follow me; and let the dead bury their dead.

Jesus would not give the man funeral leave. He would require him to report for work as usual. Instead of empathizing with the man's loss, he would make a cruel remark such as "let the dead bury their dead."

Incident Five: Family Values

You are a young man who likes to hang out with his friends; they listen to you and that makes you feel important. Your parents, on the other hand, don't understand you. One day while you are in the middle of telling a story to a large group of your friends, your family arrives. They want to talk to you about something.

Do you excuse yourself from your circle of friends and attend to your family, or do you ignore them?

WWJD?

Mt:12:46: While he yet talked to the people, behold, his mother and his brethren stood without, desiring to speak with him.

Mt:12:47: Then one said unto him, Behold, thy mother and thy brethren stand without, desiring to speak with thee.

Mt:12:48: But he answered and said unto him that told him, Who is my mother? and who are my brethren?

Mt:12:49: And he stretched forth his hand toward his disciples, and said, Behold my mother and my brethren!

Mt:12:50: For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother.



Lk:14:26: If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.

Following Jesus' example, you would ignore your family, point to your friends and say, "*This is my family!*"

Incident Six: Dealing with those you Disagree With

You are giving a presentation at a business meeting. You are presenting a radical new way of doing things. Naturally, there are employees who don't agree that things should be changed. One of them asks you a question designed to make your ideas look foolish.

Do you calmly answer the question with the facts, showing how your ideas would work out as well (or better) than the old methods? Or do you get mad and lash out at those who disagree with you?

WWJD?

Mt:23:23: Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye pay tithes of mint and anise and cummin, and have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, and faith: these ought ye to have done, and not to leave the other undone.

Mt:23:24: Ye blind guides, which strain at a gnat, and swallow a camel.

Mt:23:27: Woe unto you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! for ye are like unto whited sepulchres, which indeed appear beautiful outward, but are within full of dead men's bones, and of all uncleanness.

Mt:23:28: Even so ye also outwardly appear righteous unto men, but within ye are full of hypocrisy and iniquity.

Mt:23:33: Ye serpents, ye generation of vipers, how can ye escape the damnation of hell?

Jn:2:12: After this he went down to Capernaum, he, and his mother, and his brethren, and his disciples: and they continued there not many days.

Jn:2:13: And the Jews' passover was at hand, and Jesus went up to Jerusalem,

Jn:2:14: And found in the temple those that sold oxen and sheep and doves, and the changers of money sitting:

Jn:2:15: And when he had made a scourge of small cords, he drove them all out of the temple, and the sheep, and the oxen; and poured out the changers' money, and overthrew the tables;



When Jesus met up with those he disagreed with, he resorted to verbal and physical abuse. He even went so far as to commit vandalism and acts of violence! So, now we know how to handle disagreeable people: call them names, curse at them, destroy their property and whip them!

Conclusion

In every case that we examined, we have found that what Jesus would do would be an unethical choice. Let's be glad that people merely recite the slogan WWJD instead of actually following it!

Obviously we would be better off not asking what Jesus would do. We would make more ethical decisions simply by using our own hearts and minds to determine what is right. This is, in fact, what Jesus is purported to have said on the matter:

Lk:12:57: Why don't you judge for yourselves what is right? *(NIV)*

Instead of attempting to determine what a person who lived 2,000 years ago would do in a modern situation, such judgments come from an inborn (and cultivated) sense of empathy.



Please see the related article: [Critiquing Jesus' Words](#).