

## “An Unnamed Casualty”

One of the casualties of 9/11 was never recited when the victims were named. That casualty? WWJD. The slogan, along with the bracelets and other paraphernalia produced by Christian manufacturers was at the height of popularity when the Twin Towers went down. WWJD laid under the rubble along with the other victims who were so tragically killed on that day.

Like all expressions of pop Christianity, there were justifiable criticisms of the WWJD fad. Is “What Would Jesus Do?” the right question? Don’t we just project our own ill-informed assumptions about Jesus when that question is asked? Don’t we need to ask “What *did* Jesus do?” and look to the Gospels for an answer? Can we really know what Jesus would do in our contemporary circumstances?

Yes, there were always problems with simplistically asking, “What Would Jesus Do?” But as religious fads go, I think this one was pretty good. While we can’t know exactly what Jesus would do in every situation we face, we need to carefully, prayerfully learn what the Gospels tell us of his life and words. Then with a faith-filled, imagination we can ask, “What must I do to follow Jesus in this particular circumstance?” If the stories of the life of Jesus have infiltrated our hearts and shaped our character, asking, “What Would Jesus Do?” makes sense. The question serves as a reminder not to simply go along with the consequentialist thinking. Consequentialist thinking asks, “What must I do to make things turn out the way I want them to turn out?” Or, as we have heard it expressed, “The end justifies the means.” This posture is so prevalent in our world and it justifies everything from marital affairs to torture – always for a good cause, of course.

Yes, 9/11 killed WWJD because that wasn’t the sort of question that was likely to provide the kind of answers that most people – including most Christians – were prepared to hear. To even raise the question shortly after the terrorist attacks inevitably caused discomfort and resentment. Those who ventured to display the bumper sticker that asked, “Who Would Jesus Bomb?” were often met with displeasure. How dare anyone ask such a question when we have a job to get done?! “We need to do whatever it takes!” many people said. And they definitely *didn’t mean* “We need to do whatever it takes to follow Jesus.”

But that is what we must do. Jesus called people to follow him without qualification or exception. He called people to a “whatever it takes” kind of discipleship. To seriously follow him we need to keep reading and

prayerfully pondering the Gospels. We need to keep our eyes on the Jesus presented in the scriptures, not just in our hearts. Then we need to ask of our behaviors, our priorities, our values, our passions, our positions on various issues: “Does this look like Jesus?” If it doesn’t look like Jesus, it is unworthy of a Christian, whatever “it” might be.

The name of Jesus gets evoked plenty in all sorts of quarters. But his name too often gets associated with behaviors and ideas that are totally out of keeping with Jesus as he appears in the Gospels. Too much that passes for Christian doesn’t look like Jesus. It looks harsh, judgmental, and exclusionary. It lacks tenderness, grace, hospitality, and generosity of the sort that Jesus displayed. So if WWJD is dead, maybe we need to start asking, “Does it look like Jesus?” and only accept into our lives the things that do.