

Walking with Jesus

A Radical Return to His Priorities

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Listen to Pastor Lutzer's entire series
(originally titled *What Would Jesus Do?*)
preached at The Moody Church,
Chicago, Illinois in 1989.



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CONTENTS

What Would Jesus Do?	9
Following Christ into the Desert	17
Following Christ into the Community	25
Seeking the Lost	33
Changing Our Community	41
Touching the Untouchable	49
The Power of a United Witness	57
Giving Christ a Clean Home	65
Endnotes	77

CHAPTER ONE

WHAT WOULD JESUS DO?

In 1896, Charles Sheldon released, *In His Steps*, a book about the mythical town of Raymond, which experienced transformation because church members were challenged to a new commitment. The story goes like this.

Reverend Maxwell was preparing a sermon on 1 Peter 2:21: “For to this you have been called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps.” The doorbell rang. The pastor answered it to discover a young man (called a “tramp” back in those days) looking for work. The pastor expressed his sympathy but was unable to help the dejected man standing at his door.

Rev. Maxwell returned to his work, and that Sunday he preached on “The Sacrifice and Example of Christ.” At the end of the service, a man came to the front of the church and began giving a speech. The pastor recognized him to be the same man he had seen the day before.

“I’m not drunk and I’m not crazy,” the young man said. “I lost my job ten months ago. I am a printer by trade. . . .My wife died four months ago. . . .My little girl is staying with a pastor’s family until I find a job.” He doesn’t expect them to find him a job but, he says, “What I feel puzzled about is, what is meant

by following Jesus? Do you mean that you are suffering and denying yourselves and trying to save lost suffering humanity just as I understand Jesus did?

As the story goes, the man collapsed after his brief speech and was taken to the pastor's home and cared for. He died later that week. His final words were, "You have been good to me. Somehow I feel as if it was what Jesus would do."¹

The next Sunday, Rev. Maxwell challenged his congregation asking how many would be willing to pledge themselves to one full year in which they would do nothing without first asking: "What would Jesus do?" About fifty people took him up on his challenge including a publisher of a newspaper, a superintendent of the railway, school teachers, and a woman who had just inherited a million dollars.

After the service, the pastor explained that although they might not always know what Jesus would do in a particular situation, these people were committing themselves to asking the question and answering it as best they could. He also cautioned them not to make any decisions on the basis of immediate results. The real question was: What would Jesus do? Once that was answered, it was the responsibility of each person to obey.

The rest of Charles Sheldon's book addresses the struggles each person accepting the challenge faced by applying the "What would Jesus do?" question to their lives. The newspaper publisher wondered whether Christ would have published a Sunday edition. Would a boxing match be on the front page? He made some tough decisions without any regard to the consequences. Others found it difficult to apply the question to their lives, but as best as they knew how, they were obedient to Christ. The result: a revival came to that community.

Our own lives have become very complicated. We are cluttered and confused; we don't know what we should be doing. Could our lives be simplified merely by asking: What would Jesus do? How would He treat His employees? How would He invest His money? How would He spend His time? Yes, on many occasions we might not know the answer to that question, but for each time we would be puzzled, we may have three or four times when we know perfectly well what Christ would do if He were in our shoes.

What would Jesus do? If we took this question seriously, what would our priorities be?

CHANGING WHAT WE THINK

Prayer occupied much of Jesus' life when He walked on Earth. Whole nights were spent in fellowship with His Father, seeking His guidance and companionship. That fellowship took high priority and was never compromised. Prayer must be a priority in your life.

A second priority would be people. One day Jairus, an official of the synagogue, begged Jesus to come to his home because his daughter was dying. En route, He met a woman who had a hemorrhage for twelve years. Despite the pressure of getting to the sick girl, Jesus stopped to heal this woman and speak a word of encouragement. "Daughter, your faith has made you well" (see Mark 5:21-43). Jesus had time for people.

If you were to take Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John and cut out all of the passages that tell of Christ's sacrificial involvement with people, the Gospels would only have a few pages left. Everyone, from the old to the young, from the rich young ruler to the little children felt loved in the presence of Jesus.

What would Jesus do? If we want to follow Him, we must

extend our circle of friends and become involved in the lives of others, regardless of the cost. We need to get out of our comfort zone. Instead of staying within our circle of friends, let us befriend the neighbors we never talk to, coworkers in the office, others we see regularly in our lives but never take the time to get to know them. To be like Jesus means that we accept the inconvenience others impose upon us, and we do so with graciousness and love.

If we follow Jesus, if we do as He would do, we must also live a life of purity. Jesus was not seduced by the world. So the next time we sit down to watch a movie or some other program, we must ask, “What movies (if any) would Christ watch?” We have to change our thinking about worldly things because they’re so ingrained in our daily lives. Take time to ask yourself: How much money would Jesus put in the bank? How much would He give away? How much time would He spend at work or play? How much time would He spend in service to others?”

If we seriously ask ourselves, “What would Jesus do?,” we might surprise ourselves by how often we know exactly, almost intuitively, what He would do. Those decisions might be simpler than we think.

Make a list of the changes that would have to take place in your life if you were to follow Jesus with sincerity. We would have to start with changing the way we think so we would have the mind of Christ, following Him with all of our heart. Through studying God’s Word, we will learn more about Him and begin to know what He would do. And then we’d be more apt to choose His priorities over our own.

CHANGING WHAT WE SAY AND DO

Asking “What would Jesus do?” would also change what we say.

The words we speak should reflect our Savior. Since He was known for the gracious words that proceeded out of His mouth, we would become like Him, having our speech seasoned with salt (Colossians 4:6). Just think of how different our conversations would be if before we spoke, we asked, “What would Jesus say?”

Needless to say, it would change what we do. As Paul said, “Take no part in the unfruitful works of darkness, but instead expose them” (Ephesians 5:11). It would also change what we love. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27).

Imagine how many pages we could fill with the changes that would come to our lives if we began to seriously use Jesus as our example of commitment and conduct. One thing is certain, it would lead to a life of commitment of which some of us might be afraid. But we can take comfort in knowing that whatever we do for Christ, it will never cost us as much as what His love for us cost Him. It is unlikely that we will ever have to die for Him as He did for us. Therefore, can we do any less than ask, “What would Jesus do?” and then live accordingly?

CHANGING WHAT WE VALUE

There was a man who had the responsibility of operating a drawbridge spanning a river. When a steamboat came up the river, he would put the bridge up; when a train needed to cross the river, he would lower the bridge. One day, he brought his son to work, and together they watched the bridge go up to let a steamer through. When it was time to lower the bridge, his son was nowhere to be found. The father flipped the switch to lower the bridge for the train, then he heard the cries of his son. He

realized his boy was caught in the massive gears that controlled the movement of the bridge. A train was coming, so the father had to make a quick decision. To save his son, he would have to raise the bridge once more which meant the train would go into the river. With his heart wrenching, he chose to let the bridge descend and crush his boy. A moment later, the train whizzed by, the passengers waving at the engineer oblivious to the price he had just paid for their safety.

Even as committed Christians, we sometimes forget how much our salvation cost God. Because salvation is free, we are tempted to experience its benefits without sharing in Christ's suffering. Today, Christ does not ask us to literally die for Him, though that may be necessary for some. He does, however, ask us to figuratively die to our self daily, and sometimes more often than that, even moment by moment. He asks us to face every decision with a basic question: "What would Jesus do if He were in my shoes?" When our personal desire varies from that which we know Jesus would do, He asks us to die to our self, our desires, and do as He would have us do. And although we may not *always* know what He would do, in many instances the matter is clear.

Peter wrote, "Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, so that you might follow in his steps" (1 Peter 2:21). Let's allow that statement to ring in our ears and firmly commit to follow Christ as best we can. Would you, right this moment, ask the Lord to show you what Jesus would do if He were standing where you are standing, sitting where you're sitting, or resting where you're resting? May the question, "What would Jesus do?" be branded on our conscience and may we act accordingly. Henry F. Lyte wrote these words:

WALKING WITH JESUS

Jesus, I my cross have taken,
All to leave and follow Thee;
Destitute, despised, forsaken,
Thou from hence my all shall be.

Perish every fond ambition,
All I've sought, and hoped and known;
Yet how rich is my condition.
God and heav'n are still my own!²

ENDNOTES

- 1 Charles M. Sheldon, *In His Steps* (Chicago: Advance Publishing Co., 1897), 7, 13–14, 17.
- 2 Henry Francis Lyte, “Jesus, I My Cross Have Taken,” *The Celebration Hymnal*, (Nashville: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997), 603.
- 3 Bernard of Clairvaux, “Jesus, Thou Joy of Loving Hearts,” *Hymnary.org*, https://hymnary.org/text/jesus_thou_joy_of_loving_hearts.
- 4 George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord’s Dealings with George Müller* (London: J. Nisbet & Co., 1881), 404–405.
- 5 William W. Walford, “Sweet Hour of Prayer,” *The Celebration Hymnal*, (Nashville: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997), 640.
- 6 See C.S. Lewis, *The Weight of Glory* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1949), 14–15.
- 7 Mother Goose, “Little Bo-Peep,” *Poetry Foundation*, [PoetryFoundation.org](https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46966/little-bo-peep), <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46966/little-bo-peep>.
- 8 To learn more about Dorie Van Stone, you can read the two books I co-authored with her: *Dorie: The Girl Nobody Loved* and *No Place to Cry* both published by Moody Publishers and available from Moody Church Media at MoodyMedia.org.
- 9 “U.S. Abortion Statistics By Year (1973–Current),” *Christian Life Resources*, <https://christianliferesources.com/beginning-of-life-abortion/u-s-abortion-statistics-by-year-1973-current>.
- 10 Kelly Baden and Kimya Forouzan, “Abortion Reporting Requirements as of April 17, 2026,” *Gutmacher*, <https://www.gutmacher.org/state-policy/explore/abortion-reporting-requirements>.
- 11 Elvina M. Hall, “Jesus Paid It All,” *The Celebration Hymnal*, (Nashville: Word Music/Integrity Music, 1997), 305.