



WHAT WOULD LAZARUS DO?

by Ron Benson

W.W.L.D.

I tried a WWJD? (*What Would Jesus Do?*) bracelet once. Within two minutes, I had failed. I slipped the green fabric band on my wrist and connected the clasp. I turned the band around and realized I had put it on upside down, so I was reading something like ¿(TMM. I couldn't figure out what that had to do with my life, so I knew there must be a problem. The bracelet was tight on my arm, so I had to take it off to turn it over, and when I did I broke the clasp thingy and couldn't get it to fasten



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again. So I mumbled something under my breath. Just what I mumbled is not important. But Jesus would not mumble it.

I think I must have broken the record for speed-violating the WWJD regulations. I used a little duct tape and got it back on, but after a while it just turned my wrist a little sticky and green, eliciting more mumbling. It did not seem to improve my behavior.

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Jesus is not easy to emulate, especially when it comes to the resurrected life. How exactly do I pull that off?

Frederick Buechner said about Jesus: “He rose. A few saw him briefly and talked to him. If it is true, there is nothing left to say. If it's not true, there is nothing left to say. For believers and unbelievers both, life has never been the same again. For some, neither has death.”

The resurrection of Jesus Christ changes everything. It alters our worldview on a cosmic scale. Everything we know about life and death, on that one day, the first

day of the week, was turned upside down.

The resurrection answers a longing that seems to sit on our hearts—the thirst for more of life. The fact of Jesus' resurrection impacts the way we live and the way we die. If we are Jesus-lovers, we have abundant life through Him. All of that is true, rock-solid and beyond dispute for a person who believes.

Where I struggle, however, is in how to live that life “to the full.” What does it look like to live abundantly?

When I look at the gospels, one person's story calls out to me for emulation—Lazarus. Here's a guy just like me who was dead and buried. (The Bible refers to me as dead in sin before Jesus rescued me). Lazarus was dead for four days, and then Jesus brought him back to life. (The Bible says God has made me alive in Jesus). The portrait of Lazarus is a great representation of my salvation in Christ.

My imagination goes crazy when I think of Lazarus after that moment when he was sprung from death's grip. What did he do when he heard Jesus call out? What would he say as soon as the grave clothes were peeled away from his

lips? Where would he run after his legs were unbound? What would he do with the rest of his new life—his *second* life?

I propose a new bracelet: *WWLD?* I have trouble doing what Jesus did. But I think I could pull off pretending to be Lazarus. I think Lazarus gives us a starting place to live a resurrected life here and now.

The Lazarus Experiment

After Easter last year, I encouraged the people of our church, Grace Christian Fellowship, to live like Lazarus. We called it *The Lazarus Experiment: Come Awake!*

I've always bucked Lent for reasons of freedom, and I've always had trouble giving things up anyway. So I decided to do something contra-Lent; to add something to my life every day. I shared the suggestion to our church. Lent removes things from our lives—we were going to do the opposite: make an addition, based on what we thought Lazarus might be likely to do once he was rescued from the tomb. Ask yourself this: would Lazarus have celebrated Lent?

From Easter to Ascension Day we added something each day that would emulate Lazarus' experience of new life. We asked, *What Would Lazarus Do?* (WWLD?)

Some friends suggested to me that perhaps the whole big deal was all wrong: Maybe Lazarus would not have been happy about being brought back from the dead. Wouldn't he be sad at facing life again? In fact, wouldn't he have been majorly peeved? Perhaps once the binding of his deathshroud was removed he pulled back his un-dead arm to slap whoever had called him up!

“What were you thinking, man! I was just settling down for my fifth harp lesson, sitting there on the clouds all dressed in white, getting ready to really rock the house with

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my awesome heavenly fingering, and then I hear you call, 'Lazarus! Come forth!' And I'm like, huh?! And I tell my harp teacher, 'Oh, fiddlesticks!' (because there really aren't any stronger words you can use up there), and I pull up my robe and walk on down to the gate. And Peter says, 'See you next time!' And then it occurs to me, I'm going to have to die—AGAIN! Thanks!"

(That's all wrong, of course, because Peter wasn't at the gate yet—he was with Jesus at Lazarus' tomb, watching all the drama.)

I don't want to be sacrilegious or

WWLD? concept based on the assumption that Lazarus didn't want to live again, I don't think it would really be much fun. Kind of depressing, probably.)

So, we set out to live like Lazarus—seeing our lives as a complete and utter gift of God's grace, living every day with an awareness of undeserved, unlimited, unbelievable life.

Several people took on the experiment. Tricia, for instance, grabbed the whole idea and ran with it, posting



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irreverent. But really—about this whole “Was Lazarus happy to come back?” question, I’ll just say this: Life is life. God views life as really good, and death as a robber and a thief. We really don’t know much about what was going on with Lazarus or where he was while his body lay in the tomb, but I think he was happy to hear from his Lord, and thrilled to be back among the living. I imagine that as soon as the grave clothes unwound around his ankles, Lazarus ran to Jesus, fell at his feet, and laughed while he cried for joy.

(Besides, if we did the whole

nearly every day on Facebook about the things she was doing. On day twelve, when she was eating lunch at the cafeteria at work, she took a pat of butter and stuck it in her purse. A memory of her Grandpa and his love for “free” butter had triggered a thought:

Today, seeing the little golden foiled pad of butter sitting in the bowl on the counter, I grabbed it. I remembered eating a meal with my Grandpa and sharing the importance of REAL butter, and I explained to

THE LAZARUS EXPERIMENT

Here are some tips for your Lazarus Experiment:

- Think of moments when you are thrilled with being alive, and do those things.
- Challenge yourself to do something beyond the norm. (I think Lazarus might have enjoyed skydiving or a fast rollercoaster!).
- Think outside of yourself. There are a million different ways to shower grace on unsuspecting people, and it's the most fun you could ever have.
- Ask God to show you some ways you could celebrate new life in Christ.

Here are some specific examples. Use any that fit you, but be sure and craft these with your own personality. Use this list as a springboard. (Thanks to lots of friends who helped with this list).

1. Sit in the sun.
2. Eat a cupcake.
3. Give a stranger flowers.
4. Set aside an hour just to daydream.
5. Call a friend you haven't talked to in ten years.
6. Spend a few hours at a bookstore or library.
7. Cheesecake!
8. Help a friend with their car, their plumbing or their painting.
9. Take a mini-vacation.
10. Hike a new trail.
11. Go on a leisurely drive.
12. Read to a child.
13. Alfredo—any kind of alfredo!
14. Talk to your grown children without giving any advice.
15. Plant a garden inside.
16. Look at photos with your spouse.
17. Walk down the street and give a friendly greeting to everyone you meet.
18. Start a new journal.
19. Take a nap.
20. Buy new walking shoes. And use them!
21. Watch a sunrise and/or sunset from beginning to end. Extra credit if water is included.

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the staff why I was taking the memorial butter.

I could be wrong, but I think Lazarus would have relished his memories and relished even more the opportunity to make more.

As the experiment began to roll, even people outside our church got the bug. They started posting their actions and reactions on Facebook, as did I, and pretty soon lots of others were asking questions: What's this Lazarus thing? What are you up to? Please explain so we can be in on the fun!

Kaye was someone who began the experiment early on, even though she didn't attend Grace. Kaye knows more than I do about what Lazarus may have been feeling—Kaye is a cancer survivor.



As the experiment came to a close, she reflected on her experience, recalling the celebrations of life it entailed: *I celebrate the fact that I have slowed down to smell the roses, and to smell my*

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favorite perfume. During and after chemo, I abandoned perfume because of the constant low-grade nausea. So now, to celebrate life and health, I wear it again and let every whiff remind me how good it feels to feel good again.

My Celebration of New Life

Here are some items from my own experiment:

Day 1: I took a walk in the grass without shoes.

Day 5: At an intersection between Bay City and Freeland, at approx. 9:30 pm, I did that “car-run-around” thing, where you get

out, run around the car, and jump back in. I did it alone, but with cars waiting behind me. They honked.

Day 8: Windows rolled down—fifty degrees—bright orange sunset in front of us—Juke Joint playing the blues loud on the radio—Jono (my son) and I boogie-in' freely down the old Freeland Road.

Day 17: Told the proprietors of Big Apple Bagel that they make the best bagels in Mid-Michigan.

Day 20: Fished with my son Jeremy. Waved at boaters in the river.

Day 21: Held my tongue.

Day 25: Burned incense while I prayed in my office. (*I know, spooky!*)

Day 31: Kissed a beautiful woman. (*My wife! And I do mean kissed.*)

Day 40: Enjoyed a second helping of the best homemade falafel ever, made by my son Gary.

I should warn against making *The Lazarus Experiment* another ritual to stick on our vests like so many Sunday School pins. What we don't need is another way to attempt to prove to God we're worthy of his love. What we do need is a way to celebrate the triumph of life over death, the victory of resurrection, the profound gift of grace in the promise of everlasting life because of Jesus. That's why one day my entry read:

Day 15: Took the day off from the Lazarus Experiment.

On her last day of the experiment, Tricia offered these insights to those who were following her Lazarus journey:

Things like this can be infectious. Many of you played along and I loved that! I learned from you and I was encouraged by those that shared words either on Facebook or face to face. Your comments kept me going.

Lazarus had the privilege of being raised by Jesus. I'm not that different from Lazarus. I'm not even close to perfect, but I've been given new life in Jesus. It is for HIS glory that I want my life to continue and have purpose. Just like Lazarus.

My guess is that once you get

started, you'll come up with all kinds of ideas. If you're looking for a way to celebrate new life, join us on Facebook. Look for *The Lazarus Experiment*, or check my website at www.ronbenson.net. We'll be providing tips, giving updates and pooling our experiences. Mostly, we'll be giving our praise to God.

Jones, Henry and Casey were sitting in a bar discussing the words they would like to hear spoken

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over their coffins at their funerals.

Casey says, “I would like them to say ‘He was a wonderful family man—he always supported his wife and kids, and they never wanted for anything.’”

Henry says, “That's lovely Casey. But I would like to hear them say, ‘He was a great man in the community—he undertook a lot of projects to make his community a better place.’”

Jones says, “That's very nice, Henry. But I would like to hear them say, ‘Look! He's moving!’”

We all want life. Jesus offers it to the max, and Lazarus is a living, breathing example. So this Easter, ask yourself the question: What would Lazarus—post-dead, second-time-around, grace-empowered Lazarus—*What Would Lazarus Do?* And then do it. □

Ron Benson loves life, but often finds himself living as if he were a dead man. He is grateful to a loving family who keeps him awake, and to a church that reminds him how to really live. He writes and pastors from Freeland, Michigan.