

What would Jesus post? * Qs from the pews

June 25, 2023 * Langford Community Church * Graham Gladstone

Seven years ago, when we first started doing Qs from the Pews, I was toying around with different names for the series and one of the ideas that I jotted down was 'Thinking biblically.'

That's what Qs from the pews is:

It's about thinking: we go through and address the things that you are thinking about, which is great, because it means that we're thinking together about things that have come up in your everyday life as a follower of Jesus in the real world. Some churches will limit what they talk about from the pulpit, keeping it to polite, platitudinous stuff only, but frankly, if Jesus is sovereign over all things, we need to think about all things in light of Jesus' sovereignty.

And not just think about them but think biblically about them. We need to go to the Bible to see what God has to say about this or that issue and then apply that answer in the way we live. And I hope that you realize that you can do that too. I love answering your questions but even more, I want to show you how you can do this yourself – you form your question, you go to the Bible to see what God has to say about it and then live in light of what you've learned.

So, that's what we're doing this summer: 'thinking biblically.' Not as catchy as Qs from the pews, so we'll stick with that, but accurately describes what we're doing.

The first Q from the pews that we're going to **think biblically** about today – see what I did there? ;) – is a good one: WWJP? 'What would Jesus post?' That's what I'm calling it. Here's the question as it came in:

During COVID, I saw a lot of anger and conflict online and it got me thinking 'how should Christians use social media? SHOULD Christians use social media? How would Jesus use stuff like Twitter and Instagram and Pinterest and how should His followers?'

Good questions. How should Christians use social media? SHOULD Christians use social media? How would Jesus use social media? And how should His followers use social media?

Good questions and important ones too. Something like 70% of adult North Americans and 80% of teens use social media in one form or anotherⁱ (or many!) (the number for people over 65 is around 45%)ⁱⁱ and the influence that social media exert is enormous! There are people online everyday who are actively trying to INFLUENCE you and if they amass enough followers, they can make anything seem like truth and so we need to think carefully about how we use these media as Christians. So let's dig into our questions one at a time as we think biblically about What Jesus Would Post.

And really I think we need to start here: *should* Christians use social media?

Now, the fact that I use Facebook for our Bible reading plans kind of shows where I land on this question, but I do have some very serious reservations about certain kinds of social media, especially ones that are very image heavy – Instagram, TikTok, YouTube. Because in my mind, social media of all kinds can very easily lead us to break at least three out of the ten Ten Commandments. And I realize

that Christianity is not about following rules, but the Ten Commandments are pretty basic guidelines for godly living and social media tempt us break at least three.

For one – social media can lead us to have other gods than God. Who is the centre of social media? It's me! Right? Facebook, Instagram especially show off what I'M doing, how fashionable I AM, how worthy of praise and adoration MY ACTIONS and TRAVELS and antics are. When you're constantly posting about yourself, promoting yourself, drawing attention to yourself,ⁱⁱⁱ it is very easy to push God aside in order to enthrone ourselves as 'god' in our lives. We skew older here, so this may not be as big of an issue for our church, but the temptation to exalt ourselves is always there.

And sadly, we can see the destructive outcome of what happens when people do that. Helpguide.org, a major mental health website, notes that "multiple studies have found a strong link between heavy social media and an increased risk for depression, anxiety, loneliness, self-harm, and even suicidal thoughts."^{iv} Facebook's own research has shown that Instagram made 32% of teen girls feel bad about their bodies and it exacerbated eating disorders for 17%.^v You start feeling inadequate, constantly comparing yourself to other people. You get FOMO, fear of missing out and get caught in the constant need for approval. This is what happens when you push God off the throne and attempt to take His place; you crumble under the weight of other people's expectations.

So as Christians, I do think we need to be careful about having no God but God on social media.

I think we also need to be careful about covetousness and greed. 'Thou shalt not want your neighbour's stuff.' I think it's all too easy to be mindlessly scrolling through some site and going 'oh, that's nice' and 'oh, I'd like that' and there comes a point at which you start to want what you don't have more and fail to appreciate the 'daily bread' that God has provided today.

Partway through my prep for today I discovered there's actually a book called 'What would Jesus post?' and in it, the author says: "the act of constantly fueling our desires has consequences for our inner peace. Before we realize it, our own worlds can come to seem exceedingly small, and our own possessions woefully inadequate... Social media can provide a never-ending list of Joneses to keep up with." And then he points out that while the world around us would say 'no big deal,' he rightly replies: As understandable as these feelings are, though, they're also a sin. Like, a big one."^{vi}

God specifically tells us not to covet things and so when we use social media, we need to be to be aware of that.

And along those lines, we also need to be careful about who we're looking at too. The commandment is 'thou shalt not commit adultery' and then Jesus said 'Anyone who looks at another person with lust in their eyes has committed adultery with them;' there are no shortage of people freely posting lusty photos of themselves on social media to be seen and we need to be careful what we're looking at. Paul David Tripp asks some very important questions:

"What are you exposing your heart to? ... How do you keep your thoughts pure? What is it that you expose, not just your physical eyes, but the eyes of your heart, too? This tool that is enormously beneficial for good is also a powerful tool of sin and temptation, and we need to be honest about that."^{vii}

I remember when I was teaching at Laurier, we were talking about the hypersexualization of media and one of the girls said 'I think, if you got it, flaunt it.' I clearly don't got it, but there are lots of people who would like our eyes on their body; don't go there.

If we're going to make use of social media, then we need to steer clear of the stuff that tempts and fix our eyes on what is pure.

So, social media can tempt us to have other gods than God, tempt us to covet things and lust after them, but at the same time, as Paul David Tripp said, social media can be enormously beneficial for good. Social media can allow us to reach out and connect with others, build relationships and momentum for important causes and bring us together as a community.

We need to be careful about what we're exposing ourselves to, but as Christians, I think we shouldn't throw the baby out with the bath water. If we go into it with clear eyes, keeping God at the centre of it, I think that we can legitimately make use of social media, just like any other medium.

So, SHOULD Christians use social media? If we are aware of and avoiding the things that can tempt us online, yes, I think that Christians can, if they choose, make use of social media.

So next question, how would Jesus use Tiktok or Twitter? Well, here, we're getting into the realm of speculation. I just have no idea how or if Jesus would post cat memes and family photos. I can imagine a few times with His disciples Jesus using the Star Trek Capt. Picard face palm meme. To be honest, I don't know what He would post.

But I think that we CAN come up with some biblical principles that would He would probably follow if He was posting. And I think these are legitimate principles that we ourselves can use as we follow Jesus while using social media. Let me give you three:

1. Use social media to glorify God, not self. Use social media to glorify God and not yourself.

We've already talked about how easy it is to glorify yourself online; you show off how good you are or how many abs you have. But really, for us as Christians, if we use social media, we should use it to show off how good God is.

Psalm 115:1 should be our attitude: Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness (Psa 115:1 NIV).

The command to have no other god but God applies online just as much as it does in real life and so if we're going to use social media, we should do it in a way that honours the Lord for His love and faithfulness.

Now does that mean that our Facebook wall is going to be 'all Bible quotes all day'? You could I guess but I would argue that honouring God online is a lot like honouring God in the real world. You don't go around spouting Bible verses, right? But you do want to go around living in light of those verses do demonstrate the love and faithfulness of God to the world.

And that's what I think online should be too. It seems to me that a believer's online presence should simply be an extension of who they are as Jesus' followers in the real world.

There's a book called *Social media for missions* and in it they say: ""The best way for God's people to share is to simply be themselves and allow their 'friends' a window through which to view their relationship with Christ... Be authentic, yet conspicuously spiritual. Our use of Facebook and other social platforms should flow from a vibrant relationship with Christ."^{viii}

Thom Rainer puts it like this: "Use social media as an opportunity to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit. God is doing great works through those in social media who strive to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit every time they post: "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faith, gentleness, self-control" (Galatians 5:22).

Resist the temptation to show off yourself and use social media to glorify God rather than self.

Second, use social media to build up rather than tear down.

Again, one of the problems with social media is that we tend to do things online that we'd never do in real life. Sometimes it's like all the civility and respect that we show to one another goes out the window when we're sitting in front of keyboard. It is all too easy to fire off a smug comment or a sick burn, but as followers of Jesus, we want to be asking 'is that what Jesus would do?'

I mean, Ephesians 4:31 says: "Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice." That applies just as much online as it does in person. And just a few verses before, Ephesians 4:28, Paul says 29 Do not let any unwholesome talk come out of your mouths, but only what is helpful for building others up according to their needs, that it may benefit those who listen. (Eph 4:29 NIV).

I think we can apply that here to say "Get rid of anger and bitterness and slander and don't let any unwholesome posts flow from your fingers. Instead, make use of social media to build others up."

I mean, that 'building up' is something that we are called to in real life – applies online too.

19 Let us therefore make every effort to do what leads to peace and to mutual edification. (Rom 14:19 NIV).

2 Each of us should please his neighbor for his good, to build him up. (Rom 15:2 NIV).

Thom Rainer puts it like this: "Encourage others in social media. Some of the greatest encouragements I receive come from people on social media. I am so thankful for the many Christians who use this platform in obedience to the Word of God: "Therefore encourage one another and build each other up as you are already doing" (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

So, use social media to build up rather than tear down.

And finally, use social media to speak truth, not speculation.

During COVID, we learned how useful social media can be, we also discovered how fertile a ground it can be for conspiracy theories. Social media are the perfect soil for speculation because anybody can put forward an idea and reach countless people and that idea can become popular whether it's true or

not. And as people respond to it or defend the idea, conflict inevitably happens because social media love drama more than truth. Fiery tweets get likes, not gracious nuance.

And yet look at what the Bible says:

20 ...Turn away from godless chatter and the opposing ideas of what is falsely called knowledge,
21 which some have professed and in so doing have wandered from the faith (1Ti 6:20-21 NIV).

[They] ... devote themselves to myths and endless genealogies, which promote speculations rather than the stewardship from God that is by faith (1Tim 1:4).

16 Avoid godless chatter, because those who indulge in it will become more and more ungodly (2Ti 2:16 NIV).

9 Do not be carried away by all kinds of strange teachings (Heb 13:9 NIV).

Even as the Bible was being written, people were promoting false ideas and what do God say then? Leave it. Don't get involved. Don't engage in speculation but instead major in truth. This is God's word to us too. If it smacks of controversy, leave it. At the very least, check your sources! Make sure that you are basing your views on rock solid truth and if there is little or conflicting trustworthy evidence, tread careful.

Admittedly, it can be hard to check some of the truth claims that come in online, so in my mind, there's no better foundation than the way, the truth and the life who said:

... "If you hold to my teaching, you are really my disciples. 32 Then you will know the truth, and the truth will set you free" (Joh 8:31-32 NIV).

Save yourself the drama and just hold firm to the Truth. EVERY earthly power will fail so build your house on the rock and you will not fall.

Now, does that mean you should storm into speculation with the truth to set everybody right? 'I'm right, you guys are wrong, here's why.' Let me ask you: has an angry Facebook post ever changed your mind?

One of the things that came up again and again in my reading was this: if there's something wrong that you just can't help but address, do it privately. Send a DM. Take the conversation offline. I really appreciated the perspective of the 'What would Jesus post' author – he's actually an attorney who specializes in online law and he says:

"Whatever the circumstances, any interaction we engage in through social media should ultimately be geared toward building up other people and strengthening our relationships with them—preferably, relationships that also occur at least partially in person... Therefore, we should always approach social media as a tool for building genuine, live relationships, not as a substitute for them."^{ix}

As you use social media, avoid speculation and focus on Truth.

So, lots to think about here. Should we use social media as Christians? Sure, if we use it wisely. What does wise usage of social media look like? Glorify God rather than self. Build up rather than tear down. Focus on truth rather than speculation.

Is there anything else that can help us in this? Well, in my preparation there was another idea that came up again and again and I'll close with this: think before you post.

Social media are built to elicit knee jerk reactions – I like it, I'll click the thumbs up. I disagree, I'll fire off a comment.

As followers of Jesus, slow down. Pray before you post.

As Thom Rainer says: If I have learned anything about social media, I have learned that I'm not the smartest guy around. I need God's wisdom to communicate in such a way that brings honor and glory to Him. That is why I must begin with prayer.^x

Proverbs 15:28 says 'The heart of the righteous weighs its answers, but the mouth of the wicked gushes evil.' The New Living Translation makes it even clearer: The heart of the godly thinks carefully before speaking; the mouth of the wicked overflows with evil words.

And we'd do well to apply James 1:19 online: My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, ~~slow to speak~~ and slow to become angry. And slow to post.

What would Jesus post? I don't know for sure, but I do know what would honour Him. Christians who glorify God more than self, build up rather than tear down and focus on truth rather than speculation.

And don't forget to like and subscribe ;)

ⁱ See also <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2020/03/31/americans-turn-to-technology-during-covid-19-outbreak-say-an-outage-would-be-a-problem/>

ⁱⁱ <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/13/share-of-those-65-and-older-who-are-tech-users-has-grown-in-the-past-decade/>

ⁱⁱⁱ <https://www.gotquestions.org/social-networking.html>

^{iv} <https://www.helpguide.org/articles/mental-health/social-media-and-mental-health.htm>

^v <https://www.npr.org/2021/10/05/1043377310/facebook-whistleblower-frances-haugen-congress>

^{vi} Wassom, Brian D. *What Would Jesus Post?: Seven Principles Christians Should Follow in Social Media*. WestBow Press. Kindle Edition. (Chp. 'Guard your heart').

^{vii} <https://www.paultripp.com/ask-paul-tripp/posts/should-christians-be-on-social-media>

^{viii} <https://indigitous.org/article/strategies-for-how-to-use-social-media-as-a-christian/>
Social media for missions e-book: https://drive.google.com/file/d/1di5zYLh4O20oN7cvVW-aPzDwob_mqHa/view

^{ix} Wassom, *What Would Jesus Post?* (Chp. 'Build genuine community').

^x <https://bciowa.org/seven-positive-ways-christians-can-use-social-media/>