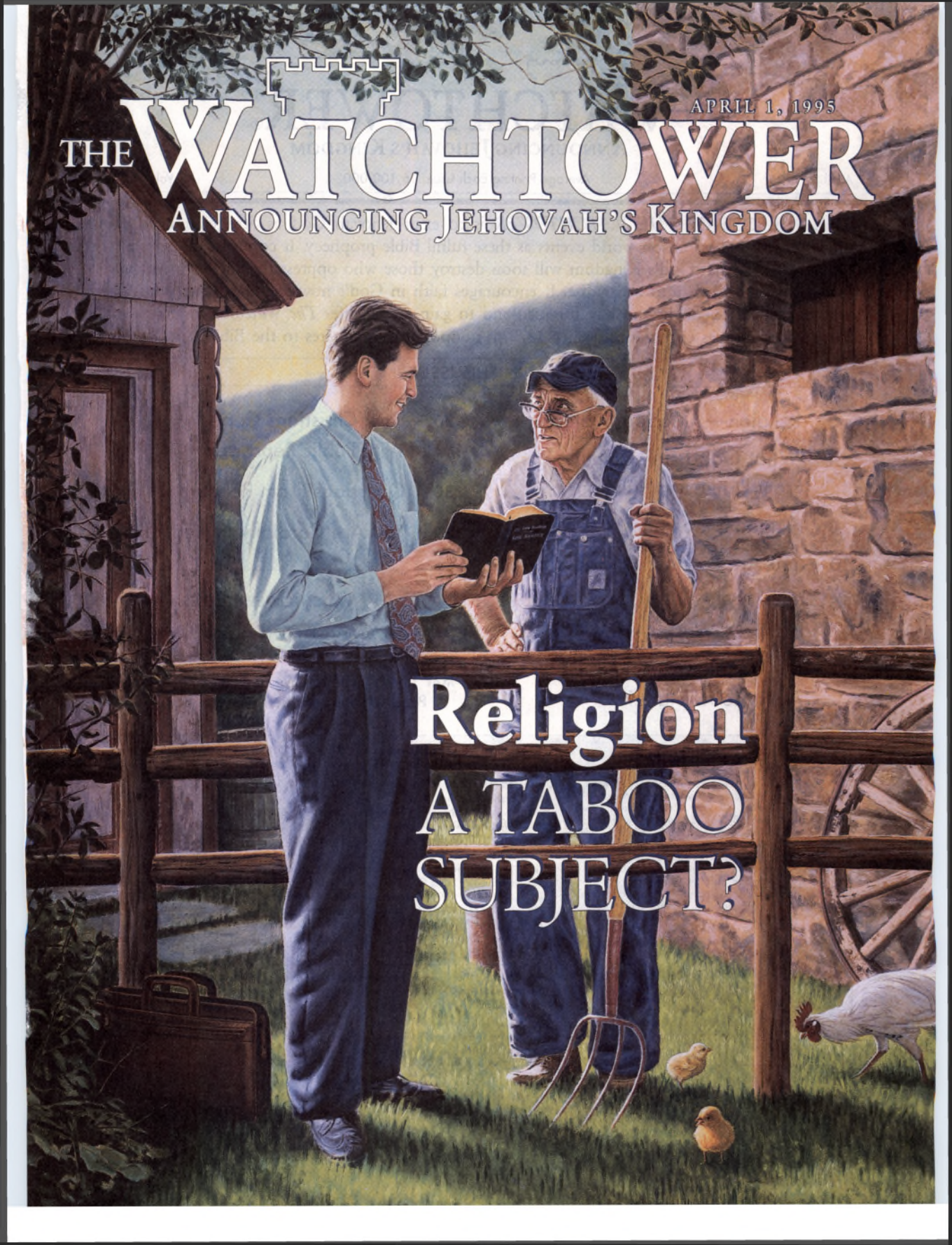




APRIL 1, 1995

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Religion
A TABOO
SUBJECT?

THE WATCHTOWER[®]

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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THE PURPOSE OF THE WATCHTOWER is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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“THERE are two subjects I never discuss: religion and politics!” That is a frequent response when Jehovah’s Witnesses speak to others about the Bible. And the viewpoint is understandable.

When people debate politics, tempers may flare and quarreling ensue. Many see through hollow promises and realize that politicians often seek only power, fame, and money. Unhappily, political differences at times lead to violence.

‘But,’ you may reason, ‘is not the same true of religion? Has not religious fervor ignited many present-day conflicts?’ In Northern Ireland, Roman Catholics and Protestants were long pitted against one another. In the Balkans, members of the Eastern Orthodox Church, Roman Catholics, and others vie for territory. The result? Atrocities and continued ill will.

Faced with the threat of death, many attempt to conceal their personal beliefs and those of their families. In Africa, centuries of religious hostility between people

of Christendom and adherents of other foreign and also ethnic religions prompted parents to give their children two names that provided a measure of protection, a custom that persists today. Thus, a young boy can pass himself off either as a church member or as professing another religion by using one name but not the other. When a person’s religious beliefs can cost him his life, it is little wonder that he hesitates to discuss religion openly.

To others, religion is a taboo subject even when their lives are not threatened. They fear that talking over their beliefs with someone of a different faith will lead to a pointless argument. Still others hold that all religion is good. As long as what a person believes satisfies him, they say, talking about the differences is a futile exercise.

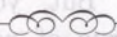
Even serious students of the nature of religion disagree among themselves. In its article “The Study and Classification of Religions,” *The New Encyclopædia Britannica* acknowledges: “Rarely . . . has there been unanimity among scholars about the nature of [religion] . . . Thus, the

Religion A TABOO SUBJECT?

subject has, throughout its history, contained elements of controversy.”

One dictionary defines religion as “the expression of man’s belief in and reverence for a superhuman power recognized as the creator and governor of the universe.” This would call for religion’s playing an important role in life. Indeed, religion has been a universal factor in framing human history. “There has been no society,” notes the

Oxford Illustrated Encyclopedia of Peoples and Cultures, “which has not sought to give order and meaning to life through some form of religion.” Involving such fundamentals as “order” and “meaning” to life, religion surely would merit something other than argument or debate. Rather, it merits discussion—that is, a thorough consideration—with someone else. But with whom, and what good can come of it?



What Good Can Come From Discussing Religion?

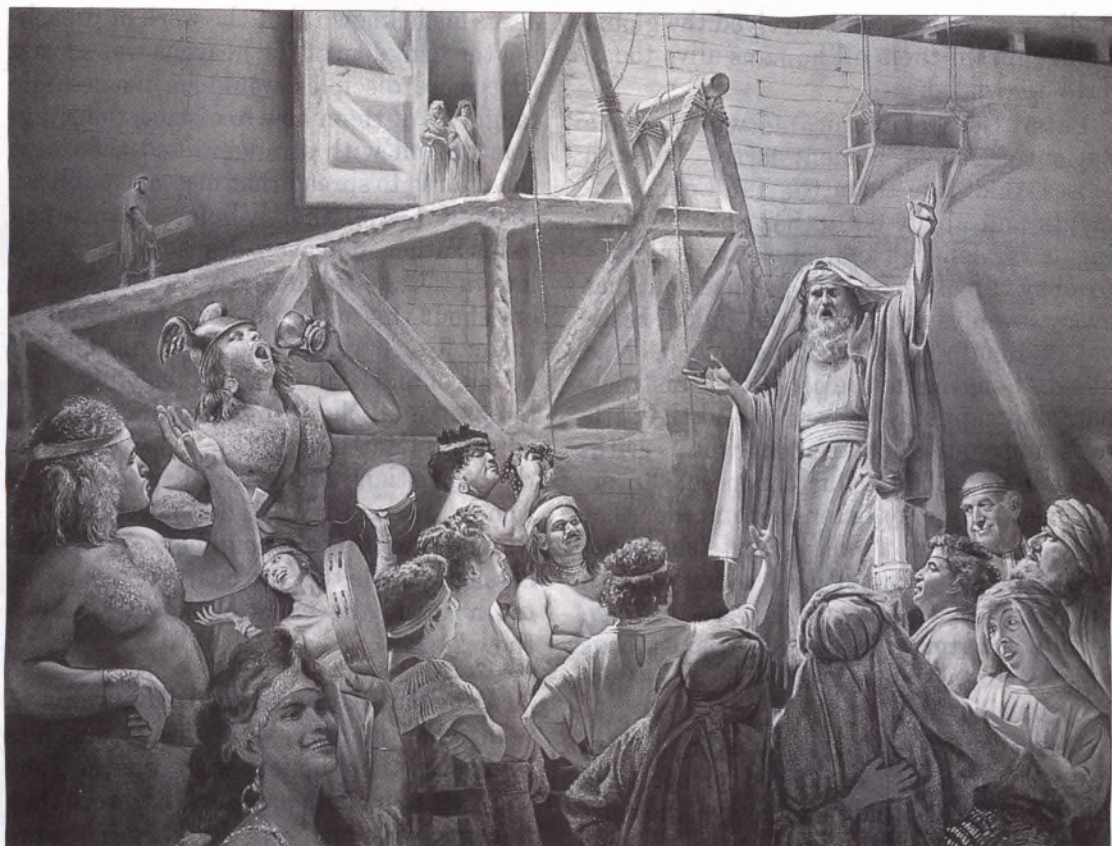
PARENTS eagerly await the first words their baby utters. When they hear a repeated syllable amid the gurgling, perhaps “Mama” or “Dada,” their hearts swell with happiness. Quickly they share news of this with friend and neighbor alike. Baby’s first communication is truly good news that brings delight.

The sounds, sights, and smells absorbed by the little child’s senses prompt a response. Of course, responses vary. But if, after a period of time, an infant failed to react to these stimuli, parents would rightly worry that their child’s development might be impaired.

Babies respond best to people they know.

When mother cuddles baby, a broad smile usually results. Yet, the touch of a visiting relative can trigger tears, even a stubborn refusal to be held by that one. Most relatives who experience this do not give up. As baby gets to know them better, to their delight the barrier of unfamiliarity collapses, and baby’s smile slowly surfaces.

Similarly, many adults hesitate to discuss their religious beliefs openly with someone who is not a longtime acquaintance. They may not understand why a stranger would want to converse about a personal matter—religion. The consequence is that they allow a barrier to come between them and those who talk about the Creator. They



even refuse to discuss what is, after all, an inborn characteristic of humankind, the desire to worship.

Actually, we should be interested in learning about our Creator, and conversing with others may put us in a position to learn. That is so because God has long been linked to open communication. Let us see how.

‘Listen and Learn’

God’s first communication with a human was with Adam in the garden of Eden. Yet, after Adam and Eve sinned, they preferred hiding when God called them, when he wanted to communicate with them further. (Genesis 3:8-13) The Bible, though, re-

Noah spoke openly about God’s purpose

cords details of men and women who welcomed communication from God.

God communicated with Noah about the impending destruction of the wicked world of his day, whereupon Noah became “a preacher of righteousness.” (2 Peter 2:5) As God’s spokesman to his generation, Noah not only demonstrated faith in God’s dealings with man but also publicly declared himself to be on Jehovah’s side. What response did Noah observe? Sadly, most of his contemporaries “took no note until the flood came and swept them all away.” (Matthew 24:37-39) But happily for us, seven members of Noah’s family listened, obeyed

God's instructions, and survived the global Deluge. From them all humans alive today have descended.

Later, God communicated with a whole nation of people, ancient Israel. Through Moses, God gave them the Ten Commandments and about 600 other equally binding laws. Jehovah expected the Israelites to obey all of them. Moses directed that every seven years, during the annual Festival of Booths, God's Law was to be read aloud. "Congregate the people," he instructed, "the men and the women and the little ones and your alien resident who is within your gates." For what purpose? "In order that they may listen and in order that they may learn, as they must fear Jehovah your God and take care to carry out all the words of this law." All were to *listen* and *learn*. Imagine how they must have enjoyed discussing what they heard!—Deuteronomy 31:10-12.

More than five centuries later, Judean king Jehoshaphat organized princes and Levites in a campaign to revive the pure worship of Jehovah. These men traveled throughout the cities of Judah teaching the inhabitants Jehovah's laws. By having these publicly discussed, the king demonstrated his boldness for true worship. As for his subjects, they were to listen and learn.—2 Chronicles 17:1-6, 9.

Bearing Witness by Discussion

God dispatched his own Son, Jesus, to earth to serve as His Spokesman. (John 1:14) As three disciples witnessed Jesus transfigured before them, they heard God's own voice declare: "This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved; listen to him." (Matthew 17:5) They readily obeyed.

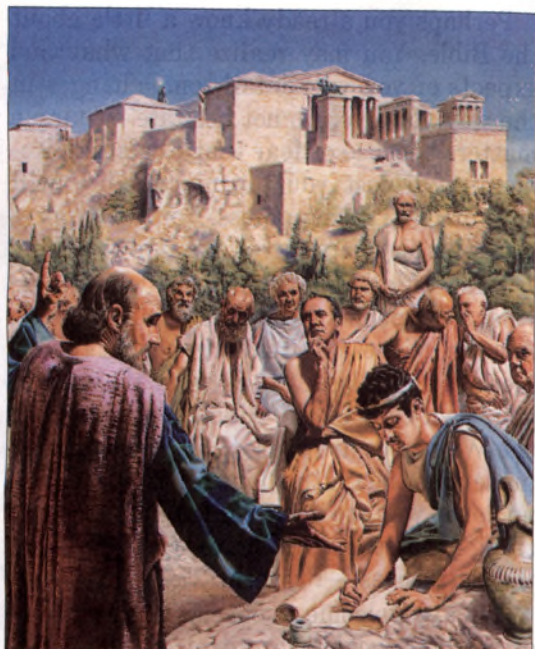
Similarly, Jesus had his apostles declare God's purposes to others. But when some six months of ministry on earth remained,

Jesus made known that the work of preaching the Kingdom of the heavens was so vast that more disciples would be needed. He taught 70 of them how to discuss the Kingdom of God with strangers and then sent them forth to spread that message publicly. (Luke 10:1, 2, 9) Shortly before he returned to his Father in heaven, Jesus urged his followers to take the initiative to talk to others about this message, even commanding them: "Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations, . . . teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19, 20) Worldwide, true Christians today fulfill that commission by discussing the good news of God's Kingdom with their neighbors. These discussions enable them to bear witness to the truth about the Creator, Jehovah.—Matthew 24:14.

Peaceful, Upbuilding Discussions

In what manner were Jesus' disciples to discuss their beliefs with others? They were not to irritate opposers, nor were they to argue with opposers. Rather, they were to search out those who welcomed the good news and then present the Scriptural evidence in support of it. Of course, God observed the reactions of those who came in contact with his Son's disciples, even as Jesus declared: "He that receives you receives me also, and he that receives me receives him also that sent me forth." (Matthew 10:40) What a rebuff it was when most of Jesus' contemporaries rejected his message!

"A slave of the Lord does not need to fight," advised the Christian apostle Paul. Rather, he "needs to be gentle toward all, qualified to teach, keeping himself restrained under evil, instructing with mildness those not favorably disposed; as perhaps God may give them repentance



leading to an accurate knowledge of truth.” (2 Timothy 2:24, 25) The way Paul proclaimed the good news to the people of Athens, Greece, furnishes a fine example. He reasoned with the Jews in their synagogue. Daily in the marketplace he talked with “those who happened to be on hand.” Though some, no doubt, simply liked listening to new ideas, Paul spoke directly and in a kindly way. He discussed with his listeners God’s message, which called on them to repent. Their reaction was much the same as that of people today. “Some began to mock, while others said: ‘We will hear you about this even another time.’” Paul did not insist on prolonging the discussion. Having preached his message, he “went out from their midst.”—Acts 17:16-34.

Later, Paul told members of the Christian congregation in Ephesus that he ‘had not held back from telling any of the things that were profitable nor from teaching publicly and from house to house.’ He had,



As Paul did in ancient Athens, Jehovah’s Witnesses teach Bible truths to others

furthermore, ‘thoroughly discussed repentance toward God and faith in Jesus Christ with both Jews and Greeks.’—Acts 20:20, 21.

These Scriptural examples reveal how God’s faithful servants in Bible times discussed religion. So today, Jehovah’s Witnesses obediently discuss religion with their neighbors.

Discussions That Achieve Much

‘Hear the Word of God.’ ‘Listen to his commands.’ How often such exhortations occur in the Bible! You can respond to these Biblical directions the next time Jehovah’s Witnesses speak to you. Listen to the message they bring you from the Bible. This message is not political but advocates a heavenly government by God, his Kingdom. This is God’s means for removing the causes of present-day conflicts. (Daniel 2:44) Thereafter this rule by God from heaven will arrange for the whole earth to be transformed into a paradise like the garden of Eden.

A former police detective frequently refused to listen when Jehovah's Witnesses spoke to him about the Bible. But with the increase of crime that he had to face, he became disillusioned with life. So he told the next Witness who called that he would investigate the evidence for the Bible message. Regular discussions ensued. Although the policeman moved several times, the Witnesses gladly searched him out at each new location to continue the discussions. Finally the officer acknowledged: "The evidence I was looking for was right there in the Holy Scriptures all the time. If those Witnesses had not persevered in talking to me, I would still be out there wondering what life is all about. As it is, I have come to learn the truth, and I am going to spend the rest of my days looking for others who are searching for God just as I was."

Interested hearers genuinely want to know more. They rightly expect reasons for the beliefs presented. (1 Peter 3:15) Just as a young child peppers his parents with questions and expects them to respond, you rightly expect the Witnesses to give you solid answers. You can be assured that they will gladly return and discuss the Bible message with you further.

Perhaps you already know a little about the Bible. You may realize that what God expects of you will entail some changes in the way you live. Do not hesitate to pursue matters because of fear that God's requirements will cost you too much. They will only bring true happiness. You will appreciate this as you progress one step at a time.

First of all, consider who Jehovah is, what he expects of you, and what he offers. Ask the Witnesses to show you what the Bible says about this. Check what they say in your own copy of the Bible. Learning that the Witnesses are reasonable in what they present as the truth about religion, you will no doubt want to delve into many more fine things that they can share with you from the Scriptures.—Proverbs 27:17.

You are welcome to observe the Witnesses at their local meeting place, the Kingdom Hall. There you will hear beneficial discussions of God's Word. You will see how those present enjoy speaking with one another about God's purposes. Allow these Witnesses to help you to learn the truth about God's will for us today. Respond to God's call to discuss true worship and receive his smile of approval, even life eternal in Paradise.—Malachi 3:16; John 17:3.



KINGDOM PROCLAIMERS REPORT

Preaching in Troublesome Season

THE apostle Paul foretold that "in the last days critical times hard to deal with [would] be here." (2 Timothy 3:1) How accurate those words have proved to be! The people of El Salvador in Central America have long experienced this bitter reality. For more than a decade, that country was engulfed in a civil war that brought misery and death to many thousands. The war is over now, but misery remains. Crime has risen sharply after the war. One local television commentator stated recently: "Violence and robbery now constitute our daily bread."

Jehovah's Witnesses have not been spared this crime wave. Burglars have broken into many Kingdom Halls and have stolen sound equipment. On several occasions gangs of armed youths have stormed into Kingdom Halls while Christian meetings were in progress, stealing money, watches, and other valuables from those in attendance. While going about their daily activities, a number of Witnesses have even been killed by robbers.

Despite these obstacles, Jehovah's Witnesses in El Salvador continue to work hard in preaching the good news. They do this in obedience to the Scriptural injunction: "In all the nations the good news has to be preached first." (Mark 13:10) There are still many in this land who yearn for the Kingdom hope that the Bible holds out, and the Witnesses are endeavoring to reach every one of them. Informal witnessing is proving to be an effective method of preaching.

While receiving medical treatment at a hospital, one Witness used every opportunity to talk to other patients about God's promises for the future, as found in the Bible. One seriously ill patient sadly lamented: "Soon I am going to die!" But the patient's gloomy outlook did not discourage the

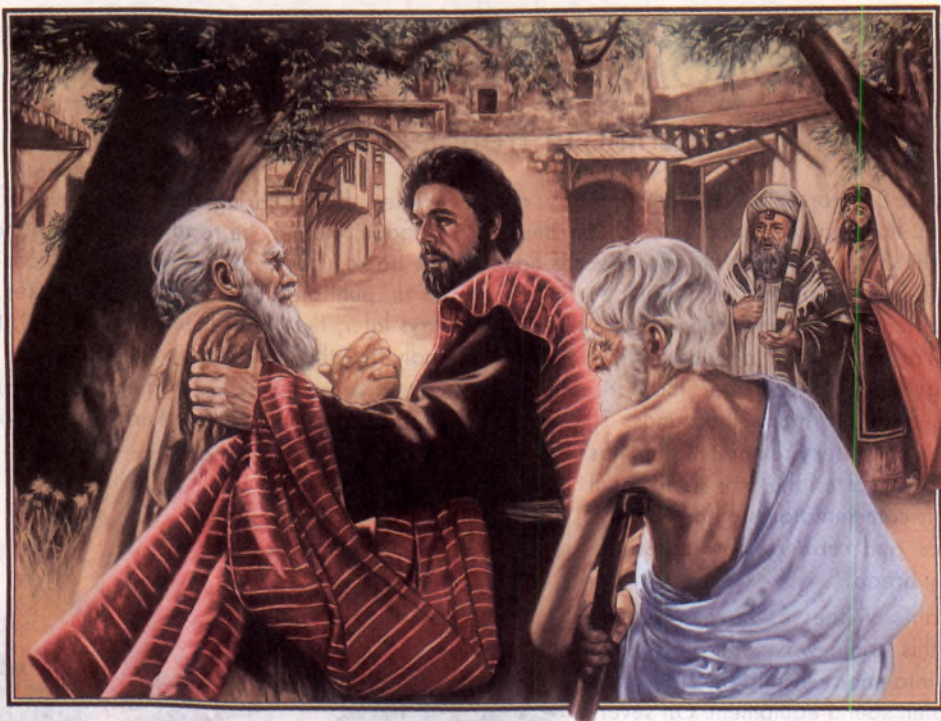
Witness from sharing the good news of God's Kingdom. Rather, he read aloud to the man from the book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses. A few days later, the Witness left the hospital, thinking sadly that the man was on his deathbed.

Four years later the Witness had to undergo medical treatment at another hospital. While he



was there, a patient came up to him and said: "Do you remember me?" It was the man whom he met four years earlier, the man who was supposedly dying! What a joyful surprise when the man hugged him and added: "Now I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses too!" The man had embraced the Bible's hope for the future, studied the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses, and dedicated his life to Jehovah. Not only was he a Witness but he had been sharing in the full-time ministry as a regular pioneer for about two years.

In this case, the seeds of truth that had been sown in an informal setting reached a responsive heart. This privilege of helping people to come to a knowledge of the truth impels true Christians to continue the preaching work in spite of these "critical times hard to deal with."



YOU ARE PRECIOUS IN GOD'S EYES!

"With a love to time indefinite I have loved you. That is why I have drawn you with loving-kindness."—JEREMIAH 31:3.

THEY could see it in his eyes. This man, Jesus, was nothing like their religious leaders; he cared. He felt pity for these people because they "were skinned and thrown about like sheep without a shepherd." (Matthew 9:36) Their religious leaders were supposed to be loving shepherds representing a loving, merciful God. Instead, they looked down on the com-

mon people as mere rabble—and accursed!* (John 7:47-49; compare Ezekiel 34:4.) Clearly, such a warped, unscriptural outlook was a far cry from Jehovah's view of his people. He had told his nation, Israel: "With a love

* In fact, they dismissed the poor with the contemptuous term "'am-ha-'a'rets," or "people of the land." According to one scholar, the Pharisees taught that one should neither trust these with valuables, nor trust their testimony, nor entertain them as guests, nor be their guests, nor even buy from them. The religious leaders said that for one's daughter to marry one of these people would be like exposing her bound and helpless to a beast.

1. How did Jesus' attitude toward the common people of his day differ from that of the Pharisees?

to time indefinite I have loved you.”—Jeremiah 31:3.

² The Pharisees, though, were hardly the first to try to convince Jehovah’s beloved sheep that they were worthless. Consider the case of Job. To Jehovah he was righteous and blameless, but the three “comforters” insinuated that Job was an immoral, wicked apostate who would die without leaving a trace behind him. They asserted that God would not value any righteousness on Job’s part, since God did not trust even his own angels and viewed heaven itself as unclean! —Job 1:8; 4:18; 15:15, 16; 18:17-19; 22:3.

³ Today, Satan is still using this ‘crafty act’ of trying to convince people that they are unloved and worthless. (Ephesians 6:11, footnote) True, he often seduces people by appealing to their vanity and pride. (2 Corinthians 11:3) But he also delights in crushing the self-respect of vulnerable ones. This is particularly so in these critical “last days.” Many today grow up in families where there is “no natural affection”; many have to deal daily with those who are fierce, selfish, and headstrong. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Years of ill-treatment, racism, hatred, or abuse may have convinced such ones that they are worthless and unlovable. One man wrote: “I don’t feel love for or loved by anyone. I find it very difficult to believe that God cares anything about me.”

⁴ The idea of personal worthlessness stabs at the heart of the truth of God’s Word, the teaching of the ransom. (John 3:16) If God would pay so high a price—his own Son’s

2. How did Job’s three companions try to convince him that he was worthless in God’s eyes?

3. What means does Satan use today to try to convince people that they are worthless and unlovable?

4, 5. (a) Why is the idea of personal worthlessness contrary to the Scriptures? (b) What is one dangerous consequence of our believing that none of our efforts are worth anything?

precious life—to buy us an opportunity to live forever, surely He must love us; surely we must be worth something in His eyes!

⁵ Furthermore, how discouraging it would be to feel that we are displeasing to God, that none of our efforts are worth anything! (Compare Proverbs 24:10.) In this negative light, even well-meant encouragement, designed to help us further our service to God where possible, may to some sound instead like condemnation. It may seem to echo our own inner conviction that whatever we do is not enough.

⁶ If you sense such negative feelings in yourself, do not despair. Many of us are unreasonably hard on ourselves from time to time. And remember, God’s Word is designed for “setting things straight” and for “overturning strongly entrenched things.” (2 Timothy 3:16; 2 Corinthians 10:4) The apostle John wrote: “By this we shall know that we originate with the truth, and we shall assure our hearts before him as regards whatever our hearts may condemn us in, because God is greater than our hearts and knows all things.” (1 John 3:19, 20) Let us consider, then, three ways in which the Bible teaches us that we are precious to Jehovah.

Jehovah Values You

⁷ First, the Bible directly teaches that each one of us has worth in God’s eyes. Jesus said: “Five sparrows sell for two coins of small value, do they not? Yet not one of them goes forgotten before God. But even the hairs of your heads are all numbered. Have no fear; you are worth more than many sparrows.” (Luke 12:6, 7) In those days, the sparrow was the cheapest of the birds sold as food, yet not one of them went unnoticed

6. What is the best antidote to extremely negative thoughts about ourselves?

7. How did Jesus teach all Christians about their value in the eyes of God?

by its Creator. Thus the groundwork is laid for a stunning contrast: When it comes to humans—who are worth far, far more—God knows every detail. It is as if the very hairs of our heads were individually numbered!

⁸ The hairs numbered? If you suspect that this aspect of Jesus' illustration is unrealistic, consider: God remembers his faithful servants so completely that he is able to resurrect them—re-creating them in every detail, including their complex genetic codes and all their years of memories and experiences. Numbering our hairs (of which the average head sprouts about 100,000) would be a simple feat by comparison!—Luke 20: 37, 38.

What Does Jehovah See in Us?

⁹ Second, the Bible teaches us what Jehovah values in us. Simply put, he delights in our positive qualities and in our efforts. King David told his son Solomon: "All hearts Jehovah is searching, and every inclination of the thoughts he is discerning." (1 Chronicles 28:9) As God searches through billions of human hearts in this violent, hate-filled world, how delighted he must be when he comes upon a heart that loves peace, truth, and righteousness! (Compare John 1:47; 1 Peter 3:4.) What happens when God finds a heart that swells with love for him, that seeks to learn about him and share such knowledge with others? At Malachi 3: 16, Jehovah tells us that he listens to those who speak with others about him and even has "a book of remembrance" for all "those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name." Such qualities are precious to him!

8. Why is it realistic to think that Jehovah could number the hairs of our heads?

9. (a) What are some qualities that Jehovah values? (b) Why do you think that such qualities are precious to him?

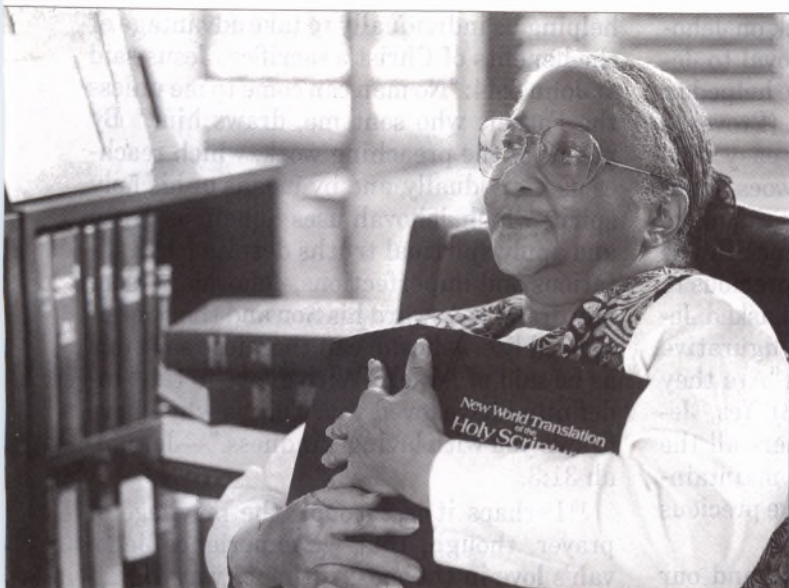
¹⁰ The self-condemning heart, however, may resist such evidence of our value in the eyes of God. It may insistently whisper, 'But there are so many others who are more exemplary in those qualities than I am. How disappointed Jehovah must be when he compares me with them!' Jehovah does not compare, nor is he a rigid, all-or-nothing thinker. (Galatians 6:4) It is with great subtlety that he reads hearts, and he values good qualities in all degrees.

¹¹ For instance, when Jehovah decreed that the entire apostate dynasty of King Jeroboam was to be executed, cleared away like "dung," He ordered that just one of the king's sons, Abijah, be given a decent burial. Why? "Something good toward Jehovah the God of Israel has been found in him." (1 Kings 14:10, 13) Did this mean that Abijah was a faithful worshiper of Jehovah? Not necessarily, since he died, as did the rest of his wicked household. (Deuteronomy 24:16) Still, Jehovah valued the "something good" that he saw in Abijah's heart and acted accordingly. *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Whole Bible* notes: "Where there is but *some* good thing of that kind, it will be found: God that seeks it, sees it, be it ever so little, and is pleased with it." And do not forget that if God finds even a small measure of some good quality in you, he can make it grow as long as you endeavor to serve him faithfully.

¹² Jehovah values our efforts in a similar manner. At Psalm 139:1-3, we read: "O Jehovah, you have searched through me, and you know me. You yourself have come to know my sitting down and my rising up. You

10, 11. (a) How might some tend to discount evidence that Jehovah values their good qualities? (b) How does the example of Abijah show that Jehovah values good qualities in all degrees?

12, 13. (a) How does Psalm 139:3 show that Jehovah values our efforts? (b) In what sense might it be said that Jehovah sifts our activities?



Jehovah notices and remembers all of those who think upon his name

have considered my thought from far off. My journeying and my lying outstretched you have measured off, and you have become familiar even with all my ways." So Jehovah is aware of all our doings. But he is far more than just aware. In Hebrew the phrase "you have become familiar even with all my ways" may also carry the meaning "you treasure up all my ways" or "you cherish all my ways." (Compare Matthew 6: 19, 20.) How, though, could Jehovah cherish our ways when we are so imperfect and sinful?

¹³ Interestingly, according to some scholars, when David wrote that Jehovah had "measured off" his journeys and rest periods, the Hebrew literally meant to "sift" or "winnow." One reference work observed: "It means . . . to winnow out all the chaff, and to leave all the grain—to save all that is valuable. So here it means that God, as it were, sifted him. . . . He scattered all that was

chaff, or all that was valueless, and saw what there was that was real and substantial." The self-condemning heart may sift our doings in the opposite way, berating us mercilessly for past errors and dismissing our accomplishments as nothing. But Jehovah forgives our sins if we sincerely repent and strive hard not to repeat our mistakes. (Psalm 103:10-14; Acts 3:19) He sifts out and remembers our good works. In fact, he remembers them forever as long as we remain faithful to him. He would view it as unrighteousness to forget

these, and he is never unrighteous!—Hebrews 6:10.

¹⁴ What are some of the good works that God values? Virtually anything we do in imitation of his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 Peter 2:21) Certainly one very important work, then, is the spreading of the good news of God's Kingdom. At Romans 10:15, we read: "How comely are the feet of those who declare good news of good things!" While we may not normally think of our lowly feet as "comely," the word Paul used here was the same one used in the Greek Septuagint version to describe Rebekah, Rachel, and Joseph—all three of whom were noted for their beauty. (Genesis 26:7; 29:17; 39:6) So our moving about in the service of our God, Jehovah, is very beautiful and precious in his eyes.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

¹⁵ Another quality that God values is our endurance. (Matthew 24:13) Remember,

14. What shows that Jehovah values our activity in the Christian ministry?

15, 16. Why does Jehovah value our endurance, and how do King David's words at Psalm 56:8 underscore this fact?

Satan wants you to turn your back on Jehovah. Each day that you remain loyal to Jehovah is another day that you have helped to furnish a reply to Satan's taunts. (Proverbs 27:11) Sometimes endurance is no easy matter. Health problems, financial woes, emotional distress, and other obstacles can make each passing day a trial. Endurance in the face of such trials is all the more precious to Jehovah. That is why King David asked Jehovah to store up his tears in a figurative "skin bottle," asking confidently, "Are they not in your book?" (Psalm 56:8) Yes, Jehovah treasures up and remembers all the tears and suffering we endure in maintaining our loyalty to him. They too are precious in his eyes.

¹⁶ In view of our finer qualities and our efforts, how clear it is that Jehovah finds much to value in each of us! No matter how Satan's world has treated us, Jehovah views us as precious and part of "the desirable things of all the nations."—Haggai 2:7.

What Jehovah Has Done to Demonstrate His Love

¹⁷ Third, Jehovah does much to prove his love for us. Surely, Christ's ransom sacrifice is the most potent answer to the satanic lie that we are worthless or unlovable. Never should we forget that the agonizing death Jesus suffered on the torture stake and the even greater agony Jehovah endured in watching his beloved Son's death were proof of their love for us. Moreover, that love applies to us personally. That is how the apostle Paul saw it, for he wrote: "The Son of God . . . loved me and handed himself over for me."—Galatians 2:20.

¹⁸ Jehovah has proved his love for us by

17. Why should Christ's ransom sacrifice convince us that Jehovah and Jesus love us as individuals?

18. In what sense does Jehovah draw us to Christ?

helping us individually to take advantage of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice. Jesus said at John 6:44: "No man can come to me unless the Father, who sent me, draws him." By means of the preaching work, which reaches us individually, and by means of his holy spirit, which Jehovah uses to help us grasp and apply spiritual truths despite our limitations and imperfections, Jehovah personally draws us toward his Son and the hope of eternal life. Jehovah can therefore say of us as he said of Israel: "With a love to time indefinite I have loved you. That is why I have drawn you with loving-kindness."—Jeremiah 31:3.

¹⁹ Perhaps it is through the privilege of prayer, though, that we experience Jehovah's love in the most intimate way. He invites each of us to "pray incessantly" to him. (1 Thessalonians 5:17) He listens! He is even called the "Hearer of prayer." (Psalm 65:2) He has not delegated this office to any other person, not even to his own Son. Just think: The Creator of the universe urges us to approach him in prayer, with freeness of speech. Your supplications may even move Jehovah to do what he might not otherwise

19. Why should the privilege of prayer convince us of Jehovah's personal love for us?

What Do You Think?

- ☐ Why does Satan try to convince us that we are worthless and unloved?
- ☐ How did Jesus teach that Jehovah values each of us?
- ☐ How do we know that Jehovah prizes our good qualities?
- ☐ How can we be sure that Jehovah treasures our efforts?
- ☐ How has Jehovah proved his love for us as individuals?

have done.—Hebrews 4:16; James 5:16; see Isaiah 38:1-16.

²⁰ No balanced Christian would take such evidence of God's love and esteem as an excuse to view himself as more important than he really is. Paul wrote: "Through the undeserved kindness given to me I tell everyone there among you not to think more of himself than it is necessary to think; but to think so as to have a sound mind, each one as God has distributed to him a measure of faith." (Romans 12:3) So while we bask in the warmth of our heavenly Father's love, let us be sound in mind and remember that God's loving-kindness is undeserved.—Compare Luke 17:10.

²¹ Let each of us do everything in our

20. Why is God's love for us no excuse for self-importance or egotism on our part?

21. What satanic lie must we continually resist, and what divine truth must we ever ponder?

power to resist all the ideas that Satan promotes in this dying old world. That includes rejecting the thought that we are worthless or unloved. If life in this system has taught you to see yourself as an obstacle too daunting even for God's immense love to surmount, or your good works as too insignificant even for his all-seeing eyes to notice, or your sins as too vast even for the death of his precious Son to cover, you have been taught a lie. Reject such lies with all the repugnance that they deserve! Let us keep ever in mind the inspired words of the apostle Paul at Romans 8:38, 39: "I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor governments nor things now here nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creation will be able to separate us from God's love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

INCITE TO LOVE AND FINE WORKS—HOW?

"Let us consider one another to incite to love and fine works, . . . encouraging one another, and all the more so as you behold the day drawing near."

—HEBREWS 10:24, 25.

THEY met in secret, huddled together behind locked doors. Outside, danger lurked everywhere. Their Leader, Jesus, had just been publicly executed, and he had warned his followers that

1, 2. (a) Why was it important that the early Christians find comfort and encouragement in their meeting together? (b) What counsel of Paul's addressed the need to meet together?

they would be treated no better than he had been. (John 15:20; 20:19) But as they spoke in hushed tones of their beloved Jesus, being together must have at least made them feel safer.

² As the years passed, Christians faced all manner of trials and persecution. Like those first disciples, they drew comfort and encouragement from meeting together. Thus,

**Hospitality helps us to get to
know one another better**

the apostle Paul wrote at Hebrews 10:24, 25: "Let us consider one another to incite to love and fine works, not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together, as some have the custom, but encouraging one another, and all the more so as you behold the day drawing near."

³ Those words are far more than a command to continue meeting together. They give a divinely inspired standard for all Christian meetings—and really, for any occasion when Christians associate together. Today more than ever, when we clearly behold Jehovah's day drawing near, the pressures and dangers of this wicked system make it imperative that our meetings be like a safe haven, a source of strength and encouragement for all. What can we do to ensure this? Well, let us examine Paul's words carefully, asking three main questions: What does it mean to "consider one another"? What does it mean to 'incite one another to love and fine works'? Finally, how can we 'encourage one another' in these hard times?

"Consider One Another"

⁴ When Paul urged Christians to "consider one another," he used the Greek verb *katano-e'o*, an intensified form of the common term "to perceive." The *Theological Dictio-*

3. Why would you say that Hebrews 10:24, 25 is more than just a command that Christians meet together?

4. What does it mean to "consider one another"?



nary of the New Testament says that it means "to direct one's whole mind to an object." According to W. E. Vine, it can also mean "to understand fully, consider closely." So when Christians "consider one another," not only do they see the surface but they apply all their mental faculties and try to see deeper.—Compare Hebrews 3:1.

⁵ We need to remember that there is much more to a person than a superficial look at his or her appearance, works, or personality may reveal. (1 Samuel 16:7) Often a quiet exterior masks deep feelings or a delightful sense of humor. Then, too, backgrounds

5. What are some aspects of a person that might lie beneath the surface, and why should we consider these?

vary greatly. Some have been through terrible ordeals in their lives; others are enduring situations right now that we would find hard to imagine. How often it happens that our irritation at some quirk in a brother or sister melts away when we learn more about the person's background or circumstances.—Proverbs 19:11.

⁶ Of course, this does not mean that uninvited we should pry into one another's personal business. (1 Thessalonians 4:11) Still, we can certainly show a personal interest in one another. This involves more than a mere greeting at the Kingdom Hall. Why not single out someone you would like to know better and aim for a few minutes of conversation before or after the meeting? Better yet, "follow the course of hospitality" by inviting one or two friends to your home for some simple refreshments. (Romans 12:13) Show an interest. Listen. Just asking how an individual came to know and love Jehovah may reveal much. You may learn still more, though, by working together in the house-to-house ministry. Considering one another in such ways will help us to develop genuine fellow feeling, or empathy.—Philippians 2:4; 1 Peter 3:8.

'Incite One Another'

⁷ When we consider one another, we are better prepared to incite, to urge one another on to action. Christian elders in particular play a key role in this regard. Of a time when Jesus spoke publicly, we read: "The effect was that the crowds were astounded at his way of teaching." (Matthew 7:28) On another occasion even some soldiers who were sent to arrest him came away saying: "Never has another man spoken like this." (John

7:46) What made Jesus' teaching so dynamic? Displays of emotionalism? No; Jesus spoke with dignity. Yet, he always aimed to reach the hearts of his listeners. Because he *considered* people, he knew just how to motivate them. He used vivid, simple illustrations that reflected the realities of everyday life. (Matthew 13:34) Similarly, those fulfilling assignments at our meetings should imitate Jesus by giving warm, enthusiastic presentations that motivate. Like Jesus, we can apply ourselves to finding illustrations that fit our audience and reach their hearts.

⁸ In serving our God, all of us may incite one another by example. Jesus certainly incited his listeners. He loved the work of the Christian ministry and exalted the ministry. He said it was like food for him. (John 4:34; Romans 11:13) Such enthusiasm can be infectious. Can you likewise let your joy in the ministry show? While carefully avoiding a boastful tone, share your good experiences with others in the congregation. When you invite others to work with you, see if you can help them find genuine pleasure in talking to others about our Grand Creator, Jehovah.—Proverbs 25:25.

⁹ Be careful, though, not to incite others in the wrong way. For instance, we might inadvertently make them feel guilty about not doing more. We might unintentionally shame them by comparing them unfavorably with others who are more visibly active, or we might even set up rigid standards and denigrate those who do not measure up. Any of these methods might move some to action for a while, but Paul did not write, 'Incite to *guilt* and fine works.' No, we must incite to *love*, then the works will follow out of a good

8. How did Jesus incite by example, and how might we imitate him in this regard?

9. (a) What are some methods of inciting others that we would want to avoid, and why? (b) What should motivate us to give of ourselves in Jehovah's service?

6. What are some ways in which we can get to know one another better, and what good might result?

7. (a) How did Jesus' teaching affect people? (b) What made his teaching so dynamic?

**When Elijah was depressed,
Jehovah kindly comforted him**

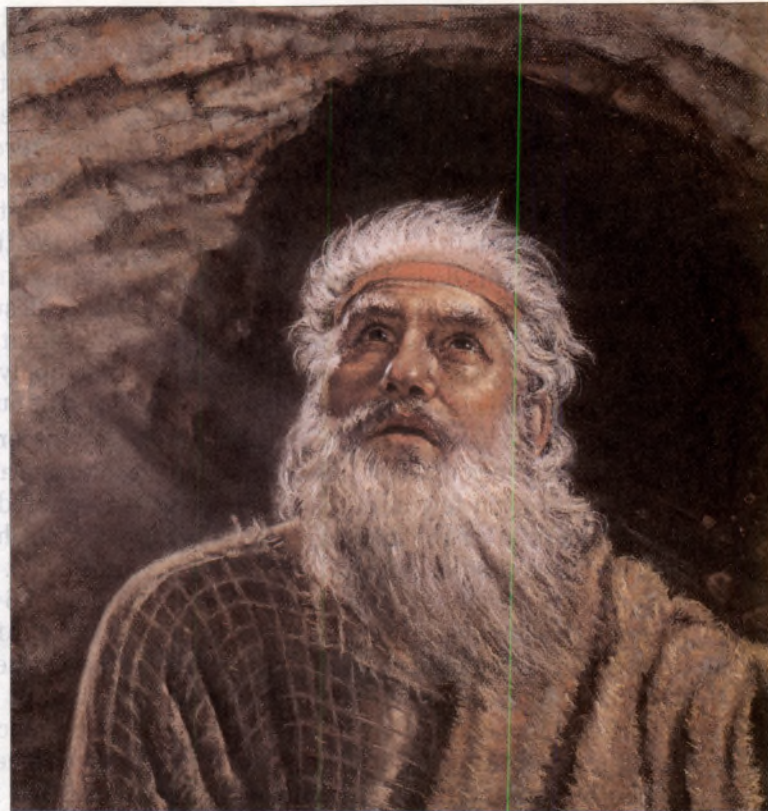
motive. No one should be motivated mainly by the consideration of what others in the congregation will think about him if he does not quite meet expectations.—Compare 2 Corinthians 9:6, 7.

¹⁰ To incite one another does not mean to control one another. For all his God-given authority, the apostle Paul humbly reminded the Corinthian congregation: ‘We are not the masters over your faith.’ (2 Corinthians 1:24) If like him we humbly realize that it is not our job to determine how much others should do in service to Jehovah, or to regulate their consciences for them in other personal decisions, we will avoid becoming “righteous overmuch,” joyless, rigid, negative, or rule oriented. (Ecclesiastes 7:16) Such qualities do not incite; they oppress.

¹¹ We want all efforts in Jehovah’s service to be made in the same spirit as in ancient Israel when donations were needed for the construction of the tabernacle. Exodus 35:21 reads: “Then they came, everyone whose heart impelled him, and they brought, everyone whose spirit incited him, Jehovah’s contribution for the work.” They were not compelled from without but impelled from within, from the heart. In fact,

10. Why should we remember that we are not masters over the faith of others?

11. What prompted the giving of contributions in the days of Israel’s tabernacle construction, and how might that be true in our day?



the Hebrew literally reads *here* that “every one whose heart *lifted him up*” made such gifts. (Italics ours.) Going further, let us endeavor to lift up one another’s hearts whenever we are together. Jehovah’s spirit can do the rest.

‘Encourage One Another’

¹² When Paul wrote that we should ‘encourage one another,’ he used a form of the Greek word *pa-ra-ka-le’o*, which can also mean ‘to strengthen, to comfort.’ In the Greek Septuagint version, this same word was used at Job 29:25, where Job was de-

12. (a) What are some meanings of the Greek word translated “encourage”? (b) How did Job’s companions fail to encourage him? (c) Why should we refrain from judging one another?

scribed as one who comforts the mourners. Ironically, when Job himself was under severe trial, he received no such encouragement. His three “comforters” were so busy judging him and giving him speeches that they failed to understand him or feel for him. In fact, in all the talking they did, not once did they even address Job by name. (Contrast Job 33:1, 31.) Evidently they viewed him more as a problem than as a person. No wonder Job exclaimed to them in frustration: “If only your souls existed where my soul is!” (Job 16:4) Likewise today, if you want to encourage someone, empathize! Do not judge. As Romans 14:4 says, “who are you to judge the house servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls. Indeed, he will be made to stand, for Jehovah can make him stand.”

¹³ A form of *pa-ra-ka-le’o* and its related noun are translated “comfort” at 2 Thessalonians 2:16, 17: “Moreover, may our Lord Jesus Christ himself and God our Father, who loved us and gave everlasting comfort and good hope by means of undeserved kindness, comfort your hearts and make you firm in every good deed and word.” Notice that Paul connects the thought of having our hearts comforted with the fundamental truth that Jehovah loves us. So we may encourage and comfort one another by confirming that important truth.

¹⁴ On one occasion the prophet Daniel was so disturbed after seeing a frightening vision that he said: “My own dignity became changed upon me to ruination, and I retained no power.” Jehovah sent an angel who several times reminded Daniel that he was “very desirable” in God’s eyes. The result? Daniel told the angel: “You have strengthened me.”—Daniel 10:8, 11, 19.

13, 14. (a) Of what fundamental truth do we need to convince our brothers and sisters in order to comfort them? (b) How was Daniel strengthened by an angel?

¹⁵ Here, then, is another way to encourage others. Commend them! It is all too easy to lapse into a critical, harsh spirit. Granted, there are times when correction may be necessary, especially by elders and traveling overseers. But they do well if they are remembered for their warmhearted encouragement rather than for having a judgmental attitude.

¹⁶ Particularly do those who are depressed need encouragement, and Jehovah expects us as fellow Christians to be a source of help—especially if we are elders. (Proverbs 21:13) What can we do? The answer may not be so simple as telling them to do more in Jehovah’s service. Why? Because that may imply that their depression is due to their not doing enough. That is not usually the case. The prophet Elijah was once so deeply depressed that he wanted to die; yet this came at a time when he was extremely busy in his service to Jehovah. How did Jehovah deal with him? He sent an angel to provide practical help. Elijah bared his heart to Jehovah, revealing that he felt that he was as worthless as his dead forefathers, that his work had been all in vain, and that he was totally alone. Jehovah listened and comforted him with awesome demonstrations of His power and with assurances that he was far from being alone and that the work he had begun would be completed. Jehovah also promised to give Elijah a companion to train who would eventually succeed him.—1 Kings 19:1-21.

¹⁷ How encouraging! May we likewise encourage those among us who are emotionally

15. How should elders and traveling overseers balance commendation with correction?

16. (a) When encouraging the depressed, why is it often not enough simply to urge them to do more in Jehovah’s service? (b) How did Jehovah help Elijah when he was depressed?

17. How might an elder encourage one who is excessively hard on himself?

troubled. Seek to understand them by *listening!* (James 1:19) Provide Scriptural comfort tailored to their individual needs. (Proverbs 25:11; 1 Thessalonians 5:14) To encourage those who are excessively hard on themselves, elders may kindly offer Scriptural evidence that Jehovah loves and values them.* Discussing the ransom can be a powerful means of encouraging those who feel worthless. One who is grieved over some past sin may need to be shown that the ransom has cleansed him if he has truly repented and turned around from any such practice.—Isaiah 1:18.

¹⁸ Of course, an elder would give thought to the particular case so as to use that teaching properly. Consider an example: Christ's ransom sacrifice was foreshadowed by the animal sacrifices of the Mosaic Law, which

* An elder may choose to study encouraging *Watchtower* and *Awake!* articles with such an individual—for example, "Will You Benefit From Undeserved Kindness?" and "Winning the Battle Against Depression."—*The Watchtower*, February 15 and March 1, 1990.

18. How should the teaching of the ransom be used to encourage one who has been victimized by another, such as by rape?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ Why is it vital that our meetings and association be encouraging in these last days?
- ☐ What does it mean to consider one another?
- ☐ What does it mean to incite one another?
- ☐ What is involved in encouraging one another?
- ☐ How might the depressed and downhearted be encouraged?

were required for the atonement of all sins. (Leviticus 4:27, 28) There was no stipulation, though, that a rape victim had to make such a sin offering. The law said that they "must do nothing" to punish her. (Deuteronomy 22:25-27) So today, if a sister has been attacked and raped and this has caused her to feel dirty and worthless, would it be appropriate to stress her need of the ransom to cleanse her of that sin? Certainly not. She did not sin in being assaulted. It is the rapist who sinned and needs to be cleansed. However, the love shown by Jehovah and Christ in providing the ransom may be used as evidence that she has not been defiled in God's eyes by someone else's sin but that she is precious to Jehovah and remains in his love.—Compare Mark 7:18-23; 1 John 4:16.

¹⁹ Yes, whatever an individual's situation in life may be, no matter what painful circumstances may darken his past, he should be able to find encouragement in the congregation of Jehovah's people. And so he will if individually we strive to consider one another, to incite one another, and to encourage one another whenever we associate together. Being imperfect, though, all of us fail to do so at times. Inevitably, we let one another down and even pain one another now and then. Try not to focus on others' failures in this regard. If you focus on shortcomings, you risk becoming overly critical of the congregation and may even fall into the very trap Paul was so eager to help us avoid, namely, forsaking the gathering of ourselves together. Never may that happen! As this old system becomes ever more dangerous and oppressive, let us be firmly resolved to do what we can to make our association at the meetings upbuilding—and all the more so as we behold Jehovah's day drawing near!

19. Why should we not expect that all association with our brothers and sisters will be encouraging, but what should be our resolve?

MY DECISION TO ADVANCE TO MATURITY

AS TOLD BY CARL DOCHOW

“Advance to Maturity or Relapse Into Sin, Which?”
was the title of an article in the June 15, 1948,
issue of *The Watchtower*. That article catapulted me from
spiritual danger in the farmlands of the United States
to a missionary career in South America
that has spanned more than 43 years.

I WAS born on March 31, 1914, the third of four boys, in a log cabin in Vergas, Minnesota. My early years were a delight. I remember fishing with Father. Mother, however, was frequently ill, and I had to leave school in the fifth grade to help her around the house. By the time I was 13, her illness was diagnosed as lung cancer.

Mother knew she didn't have long to live, so she began preparing me to take her place. She would sit in the kitchen and give me directions on how to cook and bake. Additionally, she taught me to wash the clothes, tend the garden, and take care of a hundred chickens. She also encouraged me to read a chapter of the Bible every day, which I did despite my limited reading ability. After training me for ten months, Mother died on January 27, 1928.

The War Changes Our Lives

After World War II began in September 1939, prayers were said in behalf of the troops every Sunday in our Lutheran church. My older brother Frank was determined not to kill, so when he refused to fight as part of the military, he was arrest-

ed. At his trial he stated: “Before I kill innocent people, you can shoot me!” He was sentenced to serve a year in the prison on McNeil Island off the coast of Washington State.

There Frank found more than 300 of Jehovah's Witnesses who had been imprisoned because they were strictly neutral during the war. (Isaiah 2:4; John 17:16) Soon he began associating with them and was baptized right there in prison. For good behavior, his sentence was reduced to nine months. In November 1942 we received word that Frank was free, and soon afterward he told us about the good news of God's Kingdom. After carefully examining the message with our Bibles, all of us could see that what Frank was teaching us was the truth.

Obstacles to Spiritual Advancement

In 1944, I moved to the area of Malta, Montana, to live with my uncle. We had something in common—wives who had left us after six months of marriage. He was glad to have me help him with farming and cooking, and we shared our profits

fifty-fifty. My uncle said I would be heir to his 640 acre farm if I would stay with him. Those were the boom years for farming, and how I loved it! We had a bumper crop every year, and wheat sold for as much as \$3.16 per bushel.

However, my uncle didn't like the idea that I attended the meetings of a small congregation of Witnesses in Malta. On June 7, 1947, without my uncle's knowledge, I was baptized at the circuit assembly of Jehovah's Witnesses at Wolf Point. There a Christian brother invited me to become a pioneer, or full-time minister. Although to use my life in such a way was my heart's desire, I explained that my uncle would never permit me to devote that much time to the ministry.

Shortly afterward, my uncle opened and read a letter addressed to me from a friend who urged me to become a full-time minister. Maddening than a hornet, my uncle gave me an ultimatum—quit preaching or get out. That ultimatum was a good thing because I loved farming so much I don't know if I would have left on my own. So I returned to my family in Minnesota, all of whom were now baptized and associated with the Detroit Lakes Congregation.

Initially my family encouraged me to pioneer, but in 1948 they began to cool off spiritually. It was then that the article "Advance to Maturity or Relapse Into Sin, Which?" provided the spiritual boost that I needed. It warned that "very sad consequences are certain to follow if we willfully refuse to keep up with advancing knowledge." The article said: "We cannot afford to stand still and become backward, but must make progress in righteousness. Progress, not stopping, is the greatest counterforce against relapse."

Although my family gave other excuses, I believe the real problem was their desire to

become rich. They could see the economic benefits of investing more time in farming and less in preaching. Rather than become ensnared by the desire for wealth, I made plans to pioneer. I knew that it would not be easy, and I even thought I couldn't make it. So in 1948, I put myself to the test by intentionally applying to begin pioneering in the worst part of the year—December.

Taking Up Pioneer Service

Jehovah blessed my efforts. For example, one day it was 17 degrees below zero Fahrenheit, not counting windchill. I was doing my usual street witnessing, shifting my hands frequently—putting the cold one in my pocket while holding the magazines with the other until that one would freeze and merit its turn in the pocket. A man approached. Commenting that he had noted my activity for some time, he asked: "What is in those magazines that is that important? Give me those two so I can read them."

Meanwhile, I could see that association with my family was putting my own spirituality in danger, so upon request to the Watch Tower Society, I was given a new assignment, in Miles City, Montana. There I served as the company servant, now known as the presiding overseer. Living in a seven-by-ten-foot trailer, I supported myself by working part-time in a dry-cleaning business. Occasionally I was hired for what I loved best—harvesting.

During this time, I kept hearing about the worsening spiritual condition of my family. Finally they, as well as others in the Detroit Lakes Congregation, turned against Jehovah's organization. Of the 17 Kingdom publishers in the congregation, only 7 remained faithful. My family was determined to get me out of Jehovah's organization too, so I realized there was only one solution, to progress further. But how?

Pursuing Missionary Service

During the international convention in New York City in 1950, I witnessed the graduation of missionary students from the 15th class of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. 'Oh, if only I could be among those going to serve Jehovah in a foreign assignment,' I thought.

I sent in an application and was accepted as a member of the 17th class of Gilead, which commenced in February 1951. The school's location on a farm in upstate New York was beautiful. How I wanted to work on the farm after class hours, perhaps in the barn with the cows or out with the crops! But John Booth, the overseer of Kingdom Farm at the time, explained that I was the only one who had any experience in dry cleaning. So I was assigned to do that work.

Gilead was not easy for someone who had only a fifth-grade education. Although lights were to be out by 10:30 p.m., I frequently studied until midnight. One day one of the instructors called me into his office. "Carl," he said, "I can see that your grades are not very good."

'Oh, no,' I thought to myself, 'they're going to ask me to leave.'

However, the instructor lovingly gave me some counsel on how I could make the best use of my time without studying so late. I fearfully asked: "Am I good enough to stay on here at Gilead?"

"Oh, yes," he replied. "But I don't know if you will qualify for a diploma."

I took comfort from the words of the school's president, Nathan H. Knorr. Earlier he had told the students that grades didn't impress him as much as the "stick-to-itiveness" of missionaries who remained in their assignments.

My worst subject was Spanish, but I was counting on an assignment to Alaska,

where the cold weather was what I was used to back home. Besides, I'd be able to preach in English. So you can imagine my surprise when midway through the course, I received as my assignment Ecuador, South America. Yes, I would have to speak Spanish, and right on the steamy equator!

One day an FBI agent visited me at Gilead School. He asked about the son of the company servant who had left our organization in Detroit Lakes. The Korean War was under way, and this young man claimed he was a minister of Jehovah's Witnesses and thus exempt from military service. I explained that he was no longer one of Jehovah's Witnesses. As the agent bid me farewell, he said: "May your God bless you in your work."

Later I learned that the youth was killed in one of his first battles in Korea. What a sad consequence for one who could have advanced to maturity in God's organization!

Finally, our happy graduation day came on July 22, 1951. Of course, none of my family were present, but my joy was complete when I received a diploma because of progress I had made.

Adjusting to a Foreign Field

Once I was in my assignment, I found that Mother's training really came in handy. Cooking, washing clothes by hand, and a lack of running water were not new to me. But preaching in Spanish was! I used a printed Spanish sermon for quite some time. It took three years before I could give a public talk in Spanish and that with the use of extensive notes.

When I arrived in Ecuador in 1951, there were fewer than 200 Kingdom publishers. Disciple-making seemed slow for the first 25 years or so. Our Bible teachings were quite different from the unscriptural traditions of Catholicism, and our adherence to

**Ready to pioneer in Miles City,
Montana, in 1949**



the Bible's instructions on faithfulness to one marriage mate was especially unpopular.—Hebrews 13:4.

Nevertheless, we were able to place a lot of Bible literature. Our ministry in Machala, situated in the heart of the banana-producing farmlands, serves to illustrate this. Nicholas Wesley and I were the only Witnesses there when we arrived in 1956. We would leave early in the morning on the dump trucks that were used in work on the highways being built in those days. After we rode a considerable distance, we would get off and witness to the people all the way back to where we were staying.

On one particular day, Nick and I kept track to see who of us would place more magazines. I recall that I was ahead of Nick at midday, but by evening we were tied at 114 magazines. We left hundreds of our journals each month with people on our magazine routes. Six times I placed more than a thousand magazines during a month. Think how many could learn Bible truths from those magazines!



Buying water for our missionary home, 1952

In Machala we also had the privilege of building the first congregation-owned Kingdom Hall in Ecuador. That was 35 years ago, in 1960. In those early days, we had only about 15 in attendance at our meetings. Today Machala has 11 thriving congregations!

A Visit to the States

In the late 1970's, I returned to the United States on a vacation and spent a few hours with my brother Frank. He took me in his car up on a knoll from which we could see a long way over the Red River Valley. It was beautiful, with the ripening grain waving in the wind, an ocean of heavy-headed wheat. In the distance the tree-lined Sheyenne River was discernible. The enjoyment of that peaceful beauty was interrupted when my brother began his usual line.

"If you weren't such a jackass running around there in South America, this could be yours too!"

"Frank," I cut in quickly. "Just stop it right there."



Preaching in Machala, 1957

Since becoming ill in 1989, I have read the Bible through 19 times



He didn't say another word. A few years later, he died suddenly of a stroke, leaving behind three gorgeous ranches in North Dakota with a total of more than a thousand acres, as well as my uncle's 640 acre farm in Montana to which he had become heir.

Now all in my family are deceased. But I am pleased that in Detroit Lakes, where all of us started out as Jehovah's Witnesses years ago, I have a spiritual family of more than 90 Christian brothers and sisters.

Continuing to Advance Spiritually

The last 15 years have yielded bumper crops in the spiritual harvest here in Ecuador. From some 5,000 Kingdom publishers in 1980, we now have more than 26,000. I have reaped the blessing of helping well over a hundred of these to baptism.

Now, at the age of 80, I work harder to get in 30 hours a month in the ministry than I did to fulfill my 150-hour quota in 1951. Since 1989, when I learned I had prostate cancer, I have taken advantage of my recuperation time to read. Since that year, I've

read the Bible through 19 times and the book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* 6 times. This way I keep advancing spiritually.

Yes, I've had my opportunities to reap material benefits on the farmlands of the United States. But the rewards of material riches are nothing compared to the joy I've experienced in the spiritual harvest. The branch here in Ecuador informs me that I've placed more than 147,000 magazines and 18,000 books in my missionary career. I consider these to be spiritual seeds, many of which have already sprouted; others may yet sprout in the hearts of people as they read about these Kingdom truths.

I can think of nothing better than advancing on into God's new world with all my spiritual children and millions of others who have chosen to serve our God, Jehovah. Money will not save one through the end of this wicked world. (Proverbs 11:4; Ezekiel 7:19) However, the fruitage of our spiritual work will continue—if each of us continues to advance to maturity.



HOW CHRISTIANS COPE WITH PUBLIC REPROACH

HOW do you feel when someone reproaches you or spreads lies about you? Naturally you are deeply hurt. Jehovah's Witnesses experience something similar whenever they become the target of incorrect or distorted information in the media. But as Jesus said at Matthew 5:11, 12, they still have reason to be joyful.

For instance, a Catholic publication in

Germany claimed that "each Witness is obliged to donate between 17 and 28 percent of his income to the headquarters of the sect." Jehovah's Witnesses, however, do not constitute a sect, and their work is financed entirely by voluntary contributions. Many readers were misled by this false information, which Jehovah's Witnesses find regrettable. But how should true Christians react to reproach in the media?

An Example for Christians to Follow

Matthew chapter 23 describes vividly how Jesus denounced his religious opposers for their hypocrisy and deceit. Does this provide a pattern for Christians today on how to deal with critics? Not really. The Son of God denounced his religious opposers by reason of the unique authority and insight he possessed, doing so for the benefit of the crowds that were listening.

Matthew 15:1-11 relates that Jesus was criticized because his disciples were said to have overstepped Jewish tradition. How did Jesus react? He stood his ground. On occasion, Jesus contended outspokenly with his critics, refuting their wrong views. Generally speaking, Christians today are not wrong in trying to correct misrepresentations of their work or teachings, attempting to clarify the situation in a factual and logical manner. They do this to help sincere people recognize that the criticism of Jehovah's Witnesses is unwarranted and defamatory.

But notice how Jesus reacted a short time later when his disciples pointed out: "Do you know that the Pharisees stumbled at hearing what you said?" These Pharisees had "stumbled"—they were not simply upset but became incorrigible opponents whom Jesus rejected. Hence he answered: "Let them be. Blind guides is what they are." Further discussion with such hostile antagonists was pointless, of benefit to no one, and would lead only to a fruitless argument. (Matthew 7:6; 15:12-14; compare 27:11-14.) The replies Jesus gave show that there is "a time to keep quiet and a time to speak."—Ecclesiastes 3:7.

Jehovah's Witnesses do not expect everyone to speak favorably of them. They bear in mind Jesus' words: "Woe, whenever all men speak well of you, for things like these

are what their forefathers did to the false prophets." (Luke 6:26) C. T. Russell, first president of the Watch Tower Society, was once asked why he did not defend himself against reproach. He answered: "If you stop to kick at every dog that barks at you, you'll never get very far."

So we should not let remarks by determined opposers distract us from our service to God. (Psalm 119:69) Let us concentrate on the work of true Christians, that is, evangelizing. As a natural consequence, we

When confronted
with opposers, Jesus
told his disciples:
"Let them be."
What did he mean?

will have opportunities to answer questions and to explain the substance of our work, as enhancing a person's morals and instructing him in God's Word.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

Respond to Criticism?

Jesus said of his followers: "You are no part of the world . . . On this account the world hates you." (John 15:19) Many press reports that heap reproach on Jehovah's Witnesses are an expression of this hatred, and such should be ignored. However, the media may at times present information that reflects a lack of knowledge about the

Witnesses or that distorts and misinterprets certain facts. Some journalists might draw material from biased sources. Whether we ignore false information in the media or defend the truth by appropriate means depends on the circumstances, the instigator of the criticism, and his goal.

Sometimes the facts can be corrected by a properly written letter to the editor if the letter is published in full. But such a letter could achieve the exact opposite of what is intended. How? The original untruth might thus receive even more publicity, or opposers may be handed further opportunity to get lies or slurs into print. In most cases it is wise to leave the question of a letter to the editor up to the elders concerned. If a negative press report stirs up prejudice, the branch office of the Watch Tower Society can inform congregations in that country of the facts, thus enabling all publishers to give a satisfactory explanation to inquirers.

Do you individually need to get involved at all with such twisted allegations? Jesus' counsel to "let them be," ignore them, clearly applies to this group of adversaries. Loyal Christians have Biblical reasons for shunning apostates and their views. (1 Corinthians 5:11-13; Titus 3:10, 11; 1 John 2:19;

2 John 10, 11) If someone is sincerely interested in whether criticism of the Witnesses is based on fact or fiction, your own well-founded knowledge is usually sufficient to supply an answer.—See *The Watchtower* of March 15, 1986, pages 13 and 14.

If you are confronted with distorted information in the press, take to heart the counsel of Proverbs 14:15: "Anyone inexperienced puts faith in every word, but the shrewd one considers his steps." In Switzerland many people were indignant when an emotional press report stated that a young female Witness died because her relatives refused to permit the medical staff to administer a blood transfusion. Were those the facts though? No. The patient refused a blood transfusion on religious grounds, but she did agree to alternative nonblood medical management. This could have been commenced without further ado and likely would have saved her life. However, the hospital delayed matters unnecessarily until it was too late. The press report did not mention these facts.

Hence, weigh carefully how much truth such reports contain. We can explain to inquirers that local elders attend to such cases in a loving manner and in accordance with Biblical guidelines. Sticking to principles when replying prevents us from jumping to conclusions.—Proverbs 18:13.

Firsthand Information Is Vital

In the first century, people spread lies about Jesus Christ in order to damage his reputation, some even presenting him as treasonous. (Luke 7:34; 23:2; compare Matthew 22:21.) Later, the young Christian congregation encountered broad-based opposition from both religious and worldly elements. Since "God chose the foolish things of the world," many looked down on his ser-

In Our Next Issue

Is Religious Truth Attainable?

A Printer Who Left His Mark

Jehovah's Fear-Inspiring Day Is Near

vants. (1 Corinthians 1:22-29) True Christians today must reckon with reproach, which is a form of persecution.—John 15:20.

Jehovah's Witnesses appreciate it, however, when the person they are conversing with is fair-minded and displays the same attitude as some of Paul's visitors in Rome, who declared: "We think it proper to

"Happy are you when
people reproach you
and persecute you and
lyingly say every sort
of wicked thing against
you for my sake."

—Matthew 5:11

hear from you what your thoughts are, for truly as regards this sect it is known to us that everywhere it is spoken against."
—Acts 28:22.

Offer misinformed people an explanation, doing so with mildness. (Romans 12:14; compare 2 Timothy 2:25.) Invite them to get firsthand information about Jehovah's Witnesses, which enables them to see through false accusations. You could also use explanations published by the Watch Tower Society that give details about the

organization, its history, and its teachings.* Philip once answered Nathanael by simply saying: "Come and see." (John 1:46) We can do likewise. Anyone who wishes is warmly welcome to visit the local Kingdom Hall in order to observe for himself what sort of persons Jehovah's Witnesses are and what they believe.

Do Not Be Frightened by Opposers

How encouraging to know that reproach does not stop people from becoming Witnesses! During a TV talk show in Germany, apostates wove a fabric of lies about the Witnesses. A viewer recognized the apostate embellishments as being fantasy and was moved to resume his Bible study with the Witnesses. Yes, public reproach sometimes leads to positive results!—Compare Philippians 1:12, 13.

The apostle Paul knew that some would pay more attention to "false stories" than to the truth. He therefore wrote: "Keep your senses in all things, suffer evil, do the work of an evangelizer, fully accomplish your ministry." (2 Timothy 4:3-5) So do not allow yourself to be distracted, and 'in no respect be frightened' by your opponents. (Philippians 1:28) Remain calm and collected and preach the good news joyfully, and you will cope steadfastly with public reproach. Yes, remember Jesus' promise: "Happy are you when people reproach you and persecute you and lyingly say every sort of wicked thing against you for my sake. Rejoice and leap for joy, since your reward is great in the heavens; for in that way they persecuted the prophets prior to you."
—Matthew 5:11, 12.

* See the publications *Jehovah's Witnesses—Unitedly Doing God's Will Worldwide*, *Jehovah's Witnesses in the Twentieth Century*, and *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*.

QUESTIONS FROM READERS

What attitude should be displayed at Christian baptisms?

That is an interesting question, for even though many of our readers are already baptized, they are involved, as are those who undergo baptism. Let us first comment on those who get baptized, undergoing complete immersion. What should their attitude be?

At Matthew 28:19, 20, Jesus told his followers to go and make disciples of people, teaching and baptizing them. He did not present baptism as a highly emotional experience, an act springing out of momentary excitement. It is a serious step, as we see from Jesus' example. Luke 3:21 says: "Jesus also was baptized and, as he was praying, the heaven was opened up." Yes, our Exemplar took baptism seriously, prayerfully. We cannot imagine him, after coming up out of the water, making a victory sign, letting out a whoop, or pumping his arms in the air, though recently some have done things like that. No, with only John the Baptist present, Jesus turned to his Father in prayer.

The Bible does not, though, suggest that baptism must be a somber or grim event, calling for special postures or recitation, as some churches in Christendom require today. Why, think of the day of Pentecost, when thousands of Jews and proselytes underwent Christian baptism. They had already studied God's Law and come into a relationship with him. So they simply needed to learn of and accept the Messiah, Jesus. Once they did so, they could be baptized.

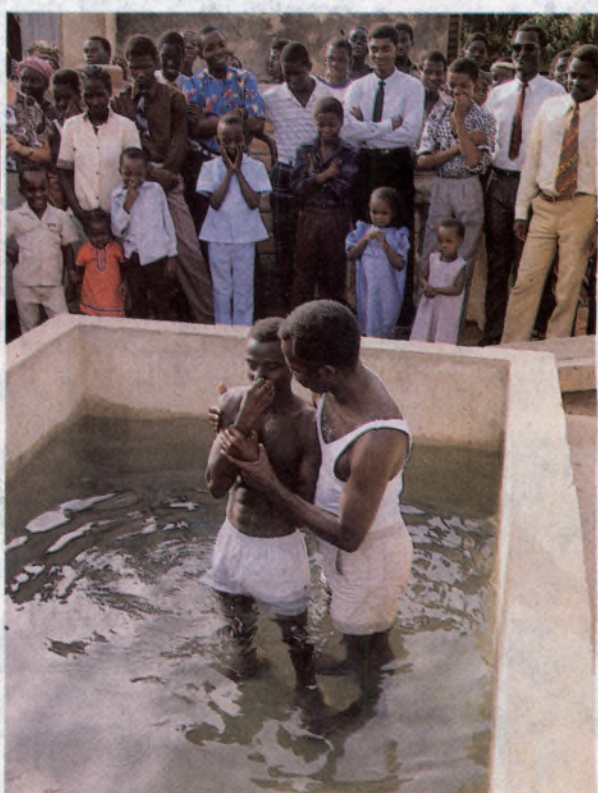
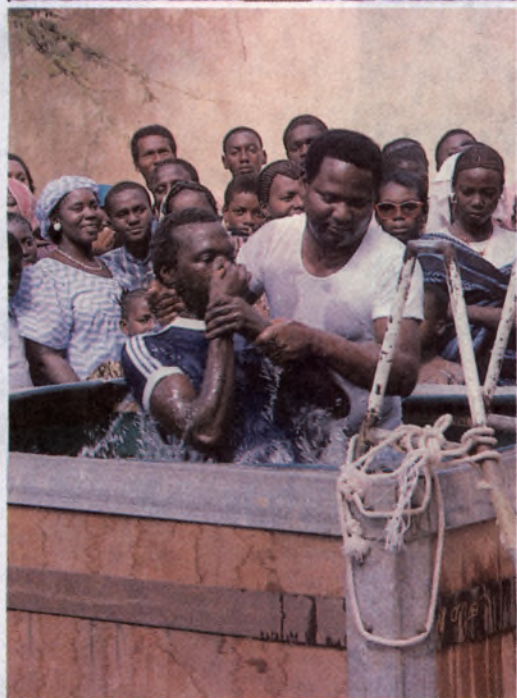
Acts 2:41 reports: "Those who embraced his word heartily were baptized." The Bible version by Weymouth reads: "Those, therefore, who joyfully welcomed his word were baptized." They found joy in the exciting news about the Messiah, and certainly that heartfelt joy spread to the baptism itself, a baptism in front of hundreds upon hundreds of happy observers. Even angels in heaven were observing and rejoicing.

Recall Jesus' words: "I tell you, joy arises among the angels of God over one sinner that repents." —Luke 15:10.

There are various ways in which each of us can reflect both the seriousness and the joy of a baptism. In some churches those getting baptized wear white robes or black ones. There is simply no Scriptural support for such a requirement. Still, very skimpy or revealing bathing outfits would be inappropriate, whether for men or for women. And as noted, upon coming out of the water, the new Christian should not make special gestures or carry on as if he had won a great victory. The rest of the Christian brotherhood are happy that the new one got baptized. He should sense that this demonstration of faith is but an early step in the long course of integrity to gain God's approval.—Matthew 16:24.

We, as observers at a public baptism, share in the joy of the occasion, especially if the one getting baptized is a relative or someone with whom we studied the Bible. To share fully, however, we ought to listen to the entire discourse with the candidates, hear them publicly answer the questions presented to them, and join in the prayer. Doing so will help us to keep the actual baptism in perspective; we will have God's view of it. After the act of baptism, our joy does not require a victory parade, a bouquet of flowers, or a party honoring the one baptized. But we could approach our new brother or sister to express pleasure over the wonderful step taken and to extend a very warm welcome into our Christian brotherhood.

In summary, then, all of us, including those who submit to water immersion, ought to treat baptism with appropriate seriousness. It is not a time for outbursts, for partying, or for hilarity. But neither is it a somber or grim time. We can rightly be glad that new ones have joined us on the way to everlasting life. And we can joyfully welcome our new brothers and sisters.



THE DEATH OF THE MAN JESUS CHRIST OVER 1,900 YEARS AGO WAS THE MOST IMPORTANT EVENT IN HUMAN HISTORY. IT OPENED UP THE PROSPECT OF ATTAINING EVERLASTING LIFE ON A PARADISE EARTH. DURING A SIMPLE CEREMONY, JESUS USED UNLEAVENED BREAD AND WINE AS SYMBOLS OF HIS LOVING HUMAN SACRIFICE. THEN HE TOLD HIS DISCIPLES: "KEEP DOING THIS IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME." (LUKE 22:19) WILL YOU REMEMBER THIS IMPORTANT EVENT?

ישוע הנצרי מלך היהודים
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