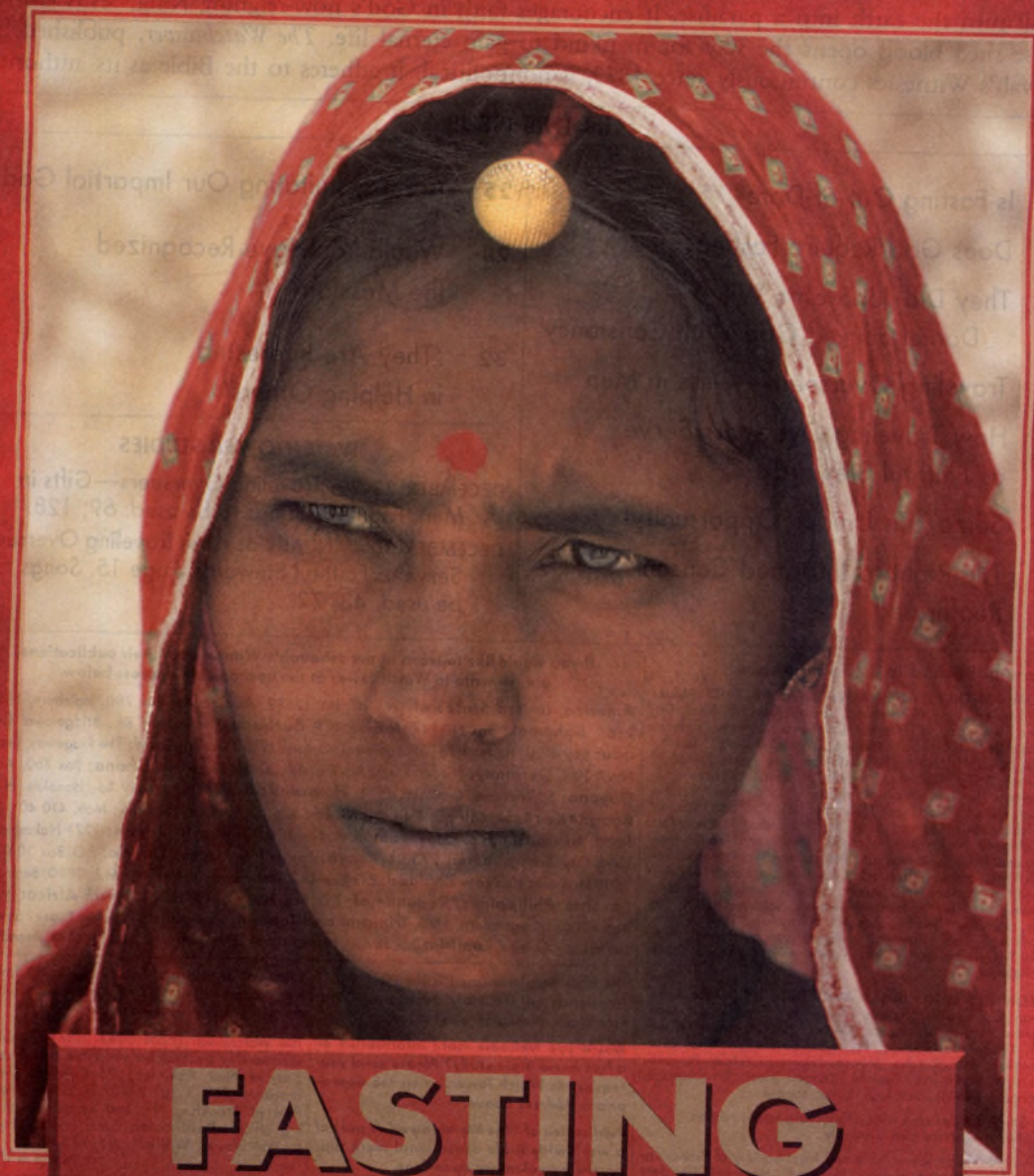


THE WATCHTOWER

NOVEMBER 15, 1996

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



FASTING
Can It Benefit You?

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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IS FASTING OUT-OF-DATE?

"I HAVE been fasting every Monday since I was a teenager," says Mrudulaben, a prosperous 78-year-old Indian woman. This has been a part of her worship, a way to ensure that she had a good marriage and healthy children, as well as protection for her husband. Now a widow, she continues to fast on Mondays for good health and for the prosperity of her children. Like her, the majority of Hindu women make regular fasts part of their life.

Prakash, a middle-aged businessman living in a suburb of Mumbai (Bombay), India, says that he fasts every year on the Mondays of Sawan (Shravan). This is a month of special religious significance on the Hindu calendar. Prakash explains: "I started out for religious reasons, but now I find an added incentive to continue for health purposes. Since Sawan comes toward the end of the monsoon, it gives my system a chance to cleanse itself of illnesses peculiar to the rainy season."

Some feel that fasting helps a person physically, mentally, and spiritually. For instance, the *Grolier International Encyclopedia* states: "Recent scientific research suggests that fasting may be healthful and, when engaged in carefully, may bring about heightened states of consciousness and sensibility." It is said that Greek philosopher Plato would fast for ten days or more and that the mathematician Pythagoras made his students fast before he taught them.

To some, fasting means total abstinence from food and water for a fixed period of time, while others take liquids during their fasts. Missing certain meals or refraining from a particular type of food is considered

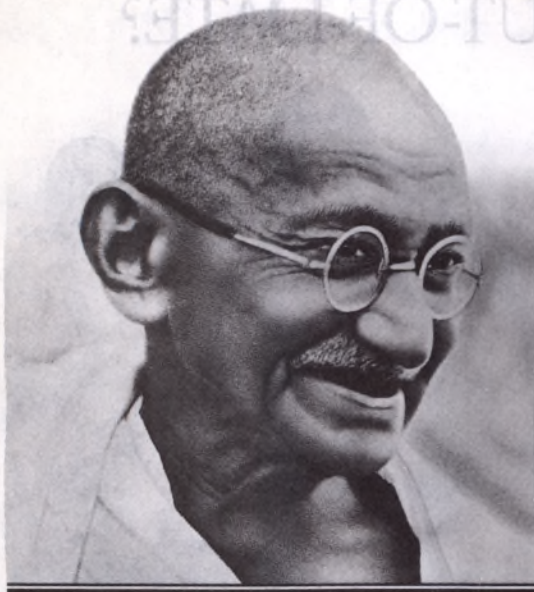


The Jain religion views fasting as a way to achieve the salvation of the soul

fasting by many. But long-term unsupervised fasting can be hazardous. Journalist Parul Sheth says that after the body has drawn on its store of carbohydrates, it next converts muscle proteins into glucose and then turns to the body fat. Changing fat into glucose releases toxic products called ketone bodies. As these accumulate, they move to the brain, harming the central nervous system. "This is when fasting can turn dangerous," says Sheth. "You can get confused, disoriented, and worse. . . . [It can cause] coma and eventually death."

An Instrument and a Ritual

Fasting has been used as a powerful tool for political or social ends. A prominent wielder of this weapon was Mohandas K. Gandhi in India. Held in high esteem by hundreds of millions of people, he used fasting to exert a strong influence on India's Hindu masses. Describing the result



Mohandas K. Gandhi used fasting as a powerful tool for political or social ends



Garo Nalbandian

In Islam, fasting is obligatory during the month of Ramadan

of his fast to settle an industrial dispute between mill laborers and mill owners, Gandhi said: "The net result of it was that an atmosphere of goodwill was created all round. The hearts of the mill-owners were touched . . . The strike was called off after I had fasted only for three days." South Africa's president, Nelson Mandela, participated in a five-day hunger strike during his years as a political prisoner.

The majority of those who have made a practice of fasting, though, have done so for religious reasons. Fasting is a prominent ritual in Hinduism. On certain days, states the book *Fast and Festivals of India*, "complete fast is observed . . . even water is not taken at all. Both men and women observe strict fast . . . to ensure happiness, prosperity and forgiveness of transgressions and sins."

Fasting is widely practiced in the Jain religion. *The Sunday Times of India Review* reports: "A Jain muni [sage] in Bombay [Mumbai] drank just two glasses of boiled water a day—for 201 days. He lost 33 kg [73 lb]." Some even fast to the point of starving themselves to death, convinced that this will bring salvation.

For adults in general practicing Islam, fasting is obligatory during the month of Ramadan. No food or water may be taken from sunrise to sunset for the entire month. Anyone ill or on a journey during this time must make up the days of the fast. Lent, the 40-day period preceding Easter, is a time of fasting for some in Christendom, and many religious orders observe fasts on other specified days.

Fasting has certainly not died out. And since it is a part of so many religions, we may ask, Is fasting required by God? Are there occasions when Christians may decide to fast? Can this be beneficial? The next article will discuss these questions.

DOES GOD REQUIRE FASTING?

GOD'S Law given through Moses required fasting only on one occasion—on the annual Day of Atonement. The Law commanded that on that day the Israelites were to 'afflict their souls,' which is understood to mean that they fasted. (Leviticus 16:29-31; 23:27; Psalm 35:13) However, this fast was not a mere formalism. The observance of the Day of Atonement moved the people of Israel to greater consciousness of their sinfulness and the need for redemption. They fasted on that day also to express sorrow for their sins and repentance before God.

Though this was the only obligatory fast under the Mosaic Law, the Israelites observed fasts on other occasions. (Exodus 34:28; 1 Samuel 7:6; 2 Chronicles 20:3; Ezra 8:21; Esther 4:3, 16) Included among these were voluntary fasts as a means of displaying repentance. Jehovah urged the erring people of Judah: "Come back to me with all your hearts, and with fasting and with weeping and with wailing." This was not to be an outward show, for God goes on to say: "Rip apart your hearts, and not your garments."—Joel 2:12-15.

In time, many fasted as an outward formalism. Jehovah detested such insincere fasting and therefore asked hypocritical Israelites: "Should the fast that I choose become like this, as a day for earthling man to afflict his soul? For bowing down his head just like a rush, and that he should spread out mere sackcloth and ashes as his couch? Is it this that you call a fast and a day acceptable to Jehovah?" (Isaiah 58:5) Rather than making a showy display of their fasting, these wayward people were asked to produce works befitting repentance.

Some fasts established by the Jews met with God's disapproval right from the outset. For example, at one time the people of Judah had four annual fasts to commemorate the calamitous events associated with Jerusalem's siege and desolation in the seventh century B.C.E. (2 Kings 25:1-4, 8, 9, 22-26; Zechariah 8:19) After the Jews were released from captivity in Babylon, Jehovah said through the prophet Zechariah: "When you fasted . . . , and this for seventy years, did you really fast to me, even me?" God did not approve of these fasts because the Jews were fasting and mourning over judgments that had come from Jehovah himself. They were fasting because of the calamity that befell them, not because of their own wrongdoing that led to it. After they were restored to their homeland, it was time for them to rejoice instead of bemoaning the past.—Zechariah 7:5.

Is Fasting for Christians?

Even though Jesus Christ never commanded his disciples to fast, he and his followers fasted on Atonement Day because they were under the Mosaic Law. Additionally, some of his disciples fasted voluntarily on other occasions, since Jesus did not direct them to avoid the practice altogether. (Acts 13:2, 3; 14:23) Yet, they were never to 'disfigure their faces that they might appear to men to be fasting.' (Matthew 6:16) Such an external display of piety might bring admiring glances and approving nods from other humans. Nevertheless, God is not pleased with such a showy display.—Matthew 6:17, 18.

Jesus also spoke of his followers' fasting at the time of his death. He was not thereby

instituting a ritual fast. Instead, he was indicating a reaction to the deep sorrow they would experience. Once he was resurrected, he would be with them again, and there would no longer be such a reason for them to fast.—Luke 5:34, 35.

The Mosaic Law ended when “the Christ was offered once for all time to bear the sins of many.” (Hebrews 9:24-28) And with the end of the Law, the command to fast on Atonement Day ended. Thus, the only obligatory fast mentioned in the Bible was removed.

What About Lent?

What, then, is the basis for Christendom’s practice of fasting during Lent? Both Catholic and Protestant churches recognize Lent, although the manner of observing it differs from church to church. Some eat just one meal a day during the full 40-day period preceding Easter. Others fast totally only on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday. For some, Lent requires abstaining from meat, fish, eggs, and milk products.

Lent is supposedly based on Jesus’ 40-day fast after his baptism. Was he then establishing a ritual to be followed yearly? Not at all. This is evident from the fact that the Bible does not record any such practice among the early Christians. Lent was first observed in the fourth century after Christ. Like many other teachings of Christendom, it was borrowed from pagan sources.

If Lent is in imitation of Jesus’ fasting in the wilderness after his baptism, why is it observed during the weeks leading up to Easter—supposedly the time of his resurrection? Jesus did not fast during the days prior to his death. The Gospel accounts indicate that he and his disciples visited homes and ate meals in Bethany just a few days before he died. And he ate the Pass-

over meal the night before his death.—Matthew 26:6, 7; Luke 22:15; John 12:2.

There is something to be learned from Jesus’ fasting after his baptism. He was embarking on a vital ministry. The vindication of Jehovah’s sovereignty and the future of the entire human race were involved. This was a time for deep meditation and for prayerfully turning to Jehovah for help and guidance. During this time Jesus appropriately fasted. This indicates that fasting can be beneficial when done with the right motive and on a fitting occasion.—Compare Colossians 2:20-23.

When Fasting Could Be Beneficial

Let us consider some occasions today when a worshiper of God might fast. A person who has committed a sin may not feel like eating for a period of time. This would not be to impress others or be in anger at the discipline received. And, of course, fasting in itself would not straighten out matters with God. However, a truly repentant person would feel deep sorrow over having hurt Jehovah and probably friends and family. Anguish and fervent prayer for forgiveness may inhibit a desire for food.

Israel’s King David had a similar experience. When faced with the prospect of losing his son by Bath-sheba, he concentrated all his efforts on praying to Jehovah to obtain mercy regarding the child. As his emotions and strength went into his prayers, he fasted. Likewise, taking food may not seem appropriate under certain stressful conditions today.—2 Samuel 12:15-17.

There may also be times when a godly person wants to focus on some deep spiritual matter. Research in the Bible and Christian publications may be necessary. A period of time may be needed for meditation. During such an absorbing study session, an

individual may choose not to be distracted by the eating of meals.—Compare Jeremiah 36:8-10.

There are Scriptural examples of servants of God fasting when serious decisions had to be made. In Nehemiah's day an oath was to be made to Jehovah, and the Jews would be liable to a curse if they broke it. They were to promise to put away their foreign wives and to keep separate from the surrounding nations. Before making this oath and during the confession of their guilt, the entire congregation fasted. (Nehemiah 9:1, 38; 10:29, 30) When faced with weighty decisions, a Christian may therefore go without food for a short period of time.

Decision-making by bodies of elders in the early Christian congregation was sometimes accompanied by fasting. Today, congregation elders faced with difficult decisions, perhaps in connection with a judicial case, may abstain from food while considering the matter.

Choosing to fast in certain circumstances is an individual decision. One person should not judge another on this matter. We

should not want to “appear righteous to men”; nor should we make food so important that it interferes with our caring for serious obligations. (Matthew 23:28; Luke 12:22, 23) And the Bible shows that God neither requires that we fast nor prohibits us from fasting.



Do you know why Jesus fasted for 40 days after his baptism?

Daniel Served God With Constancy

IT IS rare for the course of history to change overnight. Yet, that occurred in 539 B.C.E., when the Babylonian Empire was overthrown by the Medes and the Persians in just a matter of hours. By that year, Jehovah's prophet Daniel had been living as a Jewish exile in Babylon for almost 80 years. Likely in his 90's, Daniel was about to face one of the greatest tests of his integrity to God.

After Babylon's fall, things initially seemed to go well for Daniel. The new king was Darius the Mede, a 62-year-old man who looked upon Daniel with favor. One of Darius' first acts as king was to appoint 120 satraps and to elevate three men to the rank of high official.* Daniel was one of those three favored men. Recognizing Daniel's exceptional potential, Darius was even intent on giving him the position of prime minister! Just then, however, something happened that abruptly changed the king's plans.

A Devious Plan

Daniel's fellow high officials, accompanied by a large group of satraps, approached the king with an intriguing idea. They implored Darius to establish a law stipulating: "Whoever makes a petition to any god or man for thirty days except to you, O king, should be thrown to the lions' pit." (Daniel 6:7) It may have seemed to Darius that these men were avowing their loyalty to him. He may also have reasoned that this law would help him, a foreigner, to reinforce his position as head of the realm.

* The term "satrap" (literally meaning "protector of the Kingdom") refers to a governor appointed by the Persian king to serve as chief ruler over a jurisdictional district. As an official representative of the king, he was responsible for collecting taxes and remitting the tribute to the royal court.

However, the high officials and the satraps did not propose this edict for the king's sake. They were "seeking to find some pretext against Daniel respecting the kingdom; but there was no pretext or corrupt thing at all that they were able to find, forasmuch as he was trustworthy and no negligence or corrupt thing at all was found in him." So these devious men reasoned: "We shall find in this Daniel no pretext at all, except we have to find it against him in the law of his God." (Daniel 6:4, 5) Aware that Daniel prayed to Jehovah daily, they sought to make this a capital offense.

Perhaps the high officials and the satraps harbored animosity toward Daniel because he "was steadily distinguishing himself over [them], forasmuch as an extraordinary spirit was in him; and the king was intending to elevate him over all the kingdom." (Daniel 6:3) Daniel's honesty may have created an unwelcome restraint against corruption and graft. Whatever the case, these men convinced the king to sign the edict, making it part of "the law of the Medes and the Persians, which is not annulled." —Daniel 6:8, 9.

Daniel Remains Steadfast

After learning about the new statute, did Daniel stop praying to Jehovah? By no means! Kneeling in the roof chamber of his house, he prayed to God three times a day, "as he had been regularly doing prior to this." (Daniel 6:10) While he was praying, his enemies "crowded in and found Daniel petitioning and imploring favor before his God." (Daniel 6:11) When they brought the matter to the king's attention, Darius was distressed that the law he had signed would implicate Daniel. "Till the setting of the



sun he kept on striving to deliver him," the account tells us. But even the king could not rescind the law he had enacted. Daniel was therefore taken to the lions' pit, evidently a sunken or underground place. "Your God whom you are serving with constancy, he himself will rescue you," the king assured Daniel.—Daniel 6: 12-16.

After a sleepless night and fasting, Darius hurried to the pit. Daniel was alive and unharmed! The king's response was immediate. He had Daniel's enemies and their families thrown into the lions' pit as retribution. Darius also made it known throughout the realm that "in every dominion of my kingdom, people are to be quaking and fearing before the God of Daniel."—Daniel 6: 17-27.

Lesson for Us

Daniel was a fine example of faithfulness. Even the king, who did not worship Jehovah, noticed that Daniel served Him "with constancy." (Daniel 6: 16, 20) The Aramaic root word translated "constancy" basically means to "move in a circle." It suggests continuity. How well this

describes Daniel's unbroken integrity to Jehovah!

Daniel developed a pattern of constancy long before he was cast into the lions' pit. As a young captive in Babylon, he refused to consume food or drink prohibited by the Mosaic Law or defiled by pagan ritual. (Daniel 1: 8) Later, he boldly declared God's message to Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar. (Daniel 4: 19-25) Just hours before Babylon's fall, Daniel fearlessly proclaimed God's judgment to King Belshazzar. (Daniel 5: 22-28) So when Daniel faced the lions' pit, he continued in the faithful course he had established.

You too can serve Jehovah with constancy. Are you a young person? Then act now to develop a pattern of constancy by rejecting this world's bad association and corrupting conduct. If you have been serving God for some time, maintain a pattern of faithful endurance. Do not give up, for each trial we face gives us an opportunity to show Jehovah that we are determined to serve him with constancy.—Philippians 4: 11-13.

TRAVELING OVERSEERS —GIFTS IN MEN

*"When he ascended on high he carried away captives;
he gave gifts in men."*—EPHESIANS 4:8.

OVER a century ago, the *Watch Tower* announced something new. It was described as "Another Branch of the Work." What did this new activity entail? It was the modern-day inauguration of the work of traveling overseers. The September 1, 1894, issue of this journal explained that henceforth qualified brothers would be visiting groups of Bible Students 'for the purpose of building them up in the truth.'

² In the first century C.E., Christian congregations were visited by such overseers as Paul and Barnabas. These faithful men had the objective of 'building up' the congregations. (2 Corinthians 10:8) Today, we are blessed with thousands of men who are doing this in a systematic way. The Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses has appointed them as circuit and

1. What new work was announced in this journal in 1894?

2. Circuit and district overseers have what duties?



**Being on the move requires
a spirit of self-sacrifice**

district overseers. A circuit overseer serves about 20 congregations for a week each about twice a year, examining records, giving talks, and engaging in the field ministry with local Kingdom publishers. The district overseer is chairman for each of the annual circuit assemblies for a number of circuits, engages in the field ministry with the host congregations, and provides encouragement in Bible-based talks.

Their Self-Sacrificing Spirit

³ Traveling overseers are constantly on the move. This in itself requires a self-sacrificing spirit. Traveling from one congregation to another can often be difficult, but these men and their wives do so with a joyful attitude. One circuit overseer said: "My wife is most supportive and uncomplaining . . . She deserves a lot of credit for her self-sacrificing spirit." Some circuit overseers travel over 600 miles between

3. Why do traveling overseers need to have a self-sacrificing spirit?

congregations. Many drive automobiles, but others get from one place to another by public transportation, by bicycle, on horseback, or on foot. One African circuit overseer even has to wade through a river with his wife on his shoulders in order to reach one congregation. On his missionary trips, the apostle Paul had to cope with heat and cold, hunger and thirst, sleepless nights, various dangers, and violent persecution. He also had "anxiety for all the congregations"—an experience common to traveling overseers today.—2 Corinthians 11:23-29.

⁴ Like Paul's companion Timothy, traveling overseers and their wives sometimes have health problems. (1 Timothy 5:23) This places extra stress on them. One circuit overseer's wife explains: "Always being with the brothers is a strain when I am not feeling well. With the onset of menopause, I have found this especially difficult. Just having to pack all our belongings every week and move somewhere else is a real challenge. Often, I have to stop and pray to Jehovah to give me the strength to keep going."

⁵ Despite health problems and other trials, traveling overseers and their wives find joy in their service and display self-sacrificing love. Some have risked their lives to render spiritual help in times of persecution or warfare. When visiting congregations, they have manifested a spirit similar to that of Paul, who told Thessalonian Christians: "We became gentle in the midst of you, as when a nursing mother cherishes her own children. So, having a tender affection for you, we were well pleased to impart to you, not only the good news of God, but also our own souls, be-

cause you became beloved to us."—1 Thessalonians 2:7, 8.

⁶ Like other elders in the Christian congregation, traveling overseers "work hard in speaking and teaching." All such elders should "be reckoned worthy of double honor." (1 Timothy 5:17) Their example can prove beneficial if, after 'contemplating how their conduct turns out, we imitate their faith.'—Hebrews 13:7.

⁷ What effect have certain traveling elders had on others? "What a wonderful influence Brother P— was in my life!" wrote one Witness of Jehovah. "He was a traveling overseer in Mexico from the year 1960 onward. As a child, I awaited his visits with expectation and joy. When I was ten years old, he told me, 'You too are going to be a circuit overseer.' During the difficult teenage years, I frequently sought him out because he always had words of wisdom to offer. He lived to shepherd the flock! Now that I am a circuit overseer, I always try to devote time to the young ones and to put theocratic goals before them as he did for me. Even in the final years of his life, despite problems with heart failure, Brother P— always sought to offer an encouraging word. Just one day before his death in February 1995, he accompanied me to a special assembly day and put fine goals before a brother who is an architect. The brother immediately submitted an application to serve at Bethel."

They Are Appreciated

⁸ Traveling overseers and other elders favored with assignments of service by God's undeserved kindness are called

6, 7. What positive influence can hardworking traveling overseers provide?

8. Who are the "gifts in men" described in Ephesians chapter 4, and how do they benefit the congregation?

4. What effect can health problems have on the lives of traveling overseers and their wives?

5. Despite various trials, what spirit has been shown by traveling overseers and their wives?

"gifts in men." As Jehovah's representative and Head of the congregation, Jesus has provided these spiritual men in order that we might be built up individually and attain to maturity. (Ephesians 4:8-15) Any gift deserves an expression of appreciation. Especially is this true of a gift that fortifies us to keep serving Jehovah. So, then, how can we display our appreciation for the work of traveling overseers? In what ways can we show that we 'keep holding these men dear'?—Philippians 2:29.

⁹ When the circuit overseer's visit is announced, we can start making plans to have a full share in the congregation's activities for that week. Perhaps we can set aside extra time to support the field service arrangements during the visit. We may be able to serve as auxiliary pioneers during that month. Surely we will want to put the circuit overseer's suggestions into practice in order to improve our ministry. Such a receptive spirit will benefit us and will reassure him that his visit is a useful one. Yes, traveling overseers visit the congregation to build us up, but they too need to be built up spiritually. There were times when Paul was in need of encouragement, and he often asked fellow Christians to pray for him. (Acts 28:15; Romans 15:30-32; 2 Corinthians 1:11; Colossians 4:2, 3; 1 Thessalonians 5:25) Present-day traveling overseers likewise need our prayers and encouragement.

¹⁰ Have we told the circuit overseer and his wife how much we appreciate their visits? Do we thank him for the helpful counsel he gives us? Do we let him know when his field service suggestions increase our joy in the ministry? If we do, this will help to make his work a joy. (Hebrews 13:17)

9. In what ways can we show appreciation for traveling overseers?

10. How can we help to make a traveling overseer's work a joy?

One circuit overseer in Spain particularly commented on how much he and his wife treasure the thank-you notes they have received after visiting congregations. "We keep these cards and read them when we are feeling low," he says. "They are a source of real encouragement."

¹¹ The traveling overseer's wife surely benefits from words of commendation. She has made great sacrifices to assist her husband in this field of service. These faithful sisters forgo the natural desire to have their own home and, in many cases, also that of having children. Jephthah's daughter was one of Jehovah's servants who willingly relinquished her opportunity to have a husband and a family because of a vow her father made. (Judges 11:30-39) How was her sacrifice viewed? Judges 11:40 states: "From year to year the daughters of Israel would go to give commendation to the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite, four days in the year." How fine it is when we make a point of telling the circuit and district overseers' wives that they are loved and appreciated!

"Do Not Forget Hospitality"

¹² Showing hospitality is another way to display love and appreciation for those in the Christian traveling work. (Hebrews 13:2) The apostle John commended Gaius for extending hospitality to those visiting the congregation as traveling missionaries. John wrote: "Beloved one, you are doing a faithful work in whatever you do for the brothers, and strangers at that, who have borne witness to your love before the con-

11. Why should we let the circuit and district overseers' wives know that they are loved and appreciated?

12, 13. (a) What Scriptural basis is there for being hospitable to traveling overseers and their wives? (b) Illustrate how such hospitality can be mutually beneficial.



Have you shown hospitality to traveling overseers and their wives?

gregation. These you will please send on their way in a manner worthy of God. For it was in behalf of his name that they went forth, not taking anything from the people of the nations. We, therefore, are under obligation to receive such persons hospitably, that we may become fellow workers in the truth." (3 John 5-8) Today, we can further the Kingdom-preaching activity by extending similar hospitality to traveling overseers and their wives. Of course, local elders should make sure that accommodations are satisfactory, but one district overseer said: "Our involvement with the brothers cannot be predicated on who can do something for us. We would not even want to give that impression. We must be willing to accept the hospitality of any of our brothers, rich or poor."

¹³ Hospitality can be mutually beneficial. "In my family, we had the custom of invit-

ing traveling overseers to stay with us," recalls Jorge, a former circuit overseer now serving at Bethel. "I feel that these visits helped me more than I then realized. During my adolescence, I had spiritual problems. My mother was worried about this but did not know just how to help and therefore asked the circuit overseer to talk with me. At first I avoided him, since I was afraid of being criticized. But his friendly manner finally won me over. He invited me to have a meal with him one Monday, and I opened my heart because I felt sure that I was being understood. He listened carefully. His practical suggestions really worked, and I began to progress spiritually."

¹⁴ A traveling overseer tries to be spiritually helpful to young and old alike. Surely, then, we should show our appreciation for his efforts. However, what if we were to criticize him because of his weak points or compare him unfavorably with others who have visited the congregation? Likely, this would be very disheartening. It was not encouraging for Paul to hear criticisms of his work. Apparently, some Corinthian Christians were making disparaging remarks about his appearance and speaking ability. He himself quoted such critics as saying: "His letters are weighty and forceful, but his presence in person is weak and his speech contemptible." (2 Corinthians 10:10) Happily, though, traveling overseers usually hear words of loving appreciation.

¹⁵ One circuit overseer in Latin America trudges a whole day along muddy trails in order to visit his spiritual brothers and sisters living in a zone controlled by guerrillas. "It is touching to see the way the

14. Why should we be appreciative rather than critical of traveling elders?

15, 16. How are traveling overseers and their wives affected by the love and zeal displayed by their fellow believers?

brothers show their appreciation for the visit," he writes. "Even though I have to make a great effort to get there, facing many dangers and hardships, all of this is rewarded by the love and zeal the brothers show."

¹⁶ A circuit overseer in Africa writes: "Because of the love the brothers showed us, we loved the territory of Tanzania so much! Brothers were ready to learn from us, and they were happy to have us in their homes." There was a loving and happy relationship between the apostle Paul and the first-century Christian married couple Aquila and Prisca. In fact, Paul said of them: "Give my greetings to Prisca and Aquila my fellow workers in Christ Jesus, who have risked their own necks for my soul, to whom not only I but also all the congregations of the nations render thanks." (Romans 16:3, 4) Traveling overseers and their wives are thankful to have as their friends modern-day Aquilas and Priscas who go out of their way to show hospitality and provide companionship.

Strengthening the Congregations

¹⁷ Jesus said: "Wisdom is proved righteous by its works." (Matthew 11:19) The wisdom behind the traveling-overseer arrangement is evident in that it helps to strengthen the congregations of God's people. During Paul's second missionary journey, he and Silas successfully "went through Syria and Cilicia, strengthening the congregations." The book of Acts tells us: "As they traveled on through the cities they would deliver to those there for observance the decrees that had been decided upon by the apostles and older men who were in Jerusalem. Therefore, indeed,

17. Why can it be said that there is wisdom behind the arrangement for traveling overseers, and where do they get their instruction?

the congregations continued to be made firm in the faith and to increase in number from day to day." (Acts 15:40, 41; 16:4, 5) Present-day traveling overseers receive spiritual instruction through the Scriptures and the publications of "the faithful and discreet slave," as do all other Christians.—Matthew 24:45.

¹⁸ Yes, traveling elders must continue to feed at Jehovah's spiritual table. They must be well acquainted with the methods and guidelines followed by God's organization. Then such men can be a real blessing to others. By means of their fine example of zeal in the field service, they can help fellow believers to improve in the Christian ministry. The Bible-based talks given by these visiting elders upbuild listeners spiritually. By helping others to apply the counsel of God's Word, serve in harmony with Jehovah's people earth wide, and put to use the spiritual provisions made by God through the 'faithful slave,' traveling overseers strengthen the congregations they are privileged to visit.

¹⁹ When Jehovah's organization institut-

18. How do traveling overseers strengthen the congregations?

19. What questions remain for consideration?

How Would You Respond?

- ☐ What are some duties of circuit and district overseers?
- ☐ Why do traveling overseers need to have a self-sacrificing spirit?
- ☐ How can appreciation be shown for the work of traveling elders and their wives?
- ☐ What can traveling overseers do to make congregations firm in the faith?

ed the work of traveling elders among the Bible Students about a hundred years ago, this journal stated: "We shall watch for results and for the Lord's further leading." Jehovah's leading has been clearly manifest. Because of his blessing and under the supervision of the Governing Body, this work has been expanded and refined over the years. As a result, congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses throughout the earth are being made firm in the faith and are increasing in number from day to day. Evidently, Jehovah is blessing the self-sacrificing spirit of these gifts in men. But how can traveling overseers successfully carry out their work? What are their objectives? How can they achieve the most good?

HOW TRAVELING OVERSEERS SERVE AS FAITHFUL STEWARDS

"In proportion as each one has received a gift, use it in ministering to one another as fine stewards of God's undeserved kindness expressed in various ways."—1 PETER 4:10.

JEHOVAH uses all faithful Christians as stewards. A steward is often a servant in charge of a household. He may also manage his master's business affairs. (Luke 16: 1-3; Galatians 4:1, 2) Jesus called his body of loyal anointed ones on earth "the faithful steward." To this steward he has committed "all his belongings," including Kingdom-preaching activities.—Luke 12:42-44; Matthew 24:14, 45.

² The apostle Peter said that all Christians are stewards of God's undeserved kindness expressed in various ways. Each Christian has a place in which he can carry out

a faithful stewardship. (1 Peter 4:10) Appointed Christian elders are stewards, and among them are traveling overseers. (Titus 1:7) How are these traveling elders to be viewed? What qualities and objectives should they have? And how can they accomplish the most good?

Grateful for Their Service

³ Writing to a traveling overseer and his wife, one Christian married couple said: "We would like to express our gratitude for all the time and love you have given to us. As a family, we have benefited greatly from all your encouragement and advice. We know

3. Why can traveling overseers be called "fine stewards"?

1, 2. (a) How would you define the word "steward"? (b) Who are included among stewards used by God?



Traveling overseers seek to encourage fellow believers

that we have to continue growing spiritually, but with Jehovah's help and with brothers and sisters like you, the growing pains are made easier." Expressions like these are frequent because traveling overseers take a personal interest in fellow believers, just as a good steward cares well for a household's needs. Some are outstanding speakers. Many excel in the preaching work, while others are known for their warmth and compassion. By cultivating and using such gifts in ministering to others, traveling overseers can rightly be called "fine stewards."

⁴ "What is looked for in stewards is for a man to be found faithful," wrote the apostle Paul. (1 Corinthians 4:2) Ministering to fellow Christians in a different congregation week after week is a unique and joyous privilege. Nevertheless, it is also a heavy responsibility. How, then, can traveling overseers faithfully and successfully carry out their stewardship?

4. What question will now be considered?

Successfully Carrying Out Their Stewardship

⁵ *Prayerful reliance upon Jehovah is essential if traveling overseers are to be successful stewards.* Because of their schedule and many responsibilities, they could sometimes feel weighed down. (Compare 2 Corinthians 5:4.) So they need to act in harmony with the psalmist David's song: "Throw your burden upon Jehovah himself, and he himself will sustain you. Never will he allow the righteous one to totter." (Psalm 55:22) Comforting, too, are David's words: "Blessed be Jehovah, who daily carries the load for us." —Psalm 68:19.

⁶ Where did Paul get the strength to care for his spiritual responsibilities? "For all things I have the strength by virtue of him who imparts power to me," he wrote. (Philippians 4:13) Yes, Jehovah God was the Source of Paul's strength. Similarly, Peter advised: "If anyone ministers, let him minister as dependent on the strength that God supplies; so that in all things God may be glorified through Jesus Christ." (1 Peter 4:11) One brother who was a traveling overseer for many years emphasized the need for reliance on God, stating: "Always look to Jehovah in handling problems, and seek the aid of his organization."

⁷ *Balance is needed by a successful traveling overseer.* Like other Christians, he strives to "make sure of the more important things." (Philippians 1:10)* When the local elders have questions about a certain matter, it is wise for them to consult with the visiting circuit overseer. (Proverbs

* See the article "Can You Be Happy With Much to Do?" in *The Watchtower*, May 15, 1991, pages 28-31.

5. 6. Why is prayerful reliance upon Jehovah so important in the life of a traveling overseer?
7. How does balance play a part in a traveling overseer's work?



Young and old alike can benefit from association with traveling overseers and their wives



11:14; 15:22) Likely, his balanced observations and Scriptural counsel will prove to be very helpful as the elders continue handling the matter after he has left the congregation. Along somewhat similar lines, Paul told Timothy: "The things you heard from me with the support of many witnesses, these things commit to faithful men, who, in turn, will be adequately qualified to teach others."—2 Timothy 2:2.

⁸ *Scriptural study, research, and meditation are requisites for giving sound counsel.* (Proverbs 15:28) One district overseer said: "When meeting with the elders, we should not be afraid to admit that we do not know the answer to a particular question." Putting forth the effort to get "the mind of Christ" on a matter makes it possible to give Bible-based counsel that will help others to comply with God's will. (1 Corinthians 2:16) Sometimes a traveling overseer needs to write to the Watch Tower Society for direction. In any case, faith in Jehovah and love for the truth are far more important than image or eloquence. Instead of coming with "an extravagance of speech or of wisdom," Paul began his ministry in Cor-

inth "in weakness and in fear and with much trembling." Did this make him ineffective? On the contrary, it helped the Corinthians to have faith, "not in men's wisdom, but in God's power."—1 Corinthians 2:1-5.

Other Vital Qualities

⁹ *Empathy helps traveling overseers to achieve good results.* Peter urged all Christians to 'show fellow feeling,' or to be "sympathetic." (1 Peter 3:8, footnote) One circuit overseer feels the need to 'be interested in everyone in the congregation and be genuinely attentive.' With a similar spirit, Paul wrote: "Rejoice with people who rejoice; weep with people who weep." (Romans 12:15) Such an attitude moves traveling overseers to make earnest efforts to understand the problems and circumstances of fellow believers. Then they can give upbuilding Scriptural counsel that can accomplish real good if it is applied. A circuit overseer who excels in showing empathy received this letter from a congregation near Turin, Italy:

8. Why are Bible study, research, and meditation essential?

9. Why is empathy needed by traveling elders?



The traveling overseer's zealous ministry promotes zeal in others

"If you want to be interesting, be interested; if you want to be pleasing, be pleasant; if you want to be loved, be lovable; if you want to be helped, be ready to help. This is what we have learned from you!"

¹⁰ *Being humble and approachable assists traveling overseers to do much good.* One circuit overseer observed: "It is most important to maintain a humble attitude." He would caution new traveling overseers: "Do not let yourselves be unduly influenced by the more affluent brothers because of what they may do for you, nor limit your friendship to such ones, but strive always to deal with others impartially." (2 Chronicles 19:6, 7) And a truly humble traveling overseer will not have an exaggerated view of his own importance as a representative of the Society. A district overseer appropriately commented: "Be humble and willing to listen to the brothers. Always be approachable." As the greatest man who ever lived, Jesus Christ could have made people feel un-

10. What have circuit and district overseers said about being humble, and what example did Jesus set in this regard?

comfortable, but he was so humble and approachable that even children felt at ease in his presence. (Matthew 18:5; Mark 10:13-16) Traveling overseers want children, teenagers, elderly ones—indeed anyone and everyone in the congregation—to feel free to approach them.

¹¹ Of course, "we all stumble many times," and no traveling overseer is immune to making mistakes. (James 3:2) When they make mistakes, a sincere apology gives other elders an example of humility. According to Proverbs 22:4, "the result of humility and the [reverential] fear of Jehovah is riches and glory and life." And do not all of God's servants need to 'be humble in walking with their God'? (Micah 6:8, 1960 Edition) When asked what advice he would have for a new traveling elder, one circuit overseer commented: "Have high respect and regard for all the brothers, and consider them as being better than you. You will learn much from the brothers. Stay humble. Be yourself. Do not put on airs."—Philippians 2:3.

¹² *Zeal for the Christian ministry lends weight to a traveling overseer's words.* In fact, when he and his wife set zealous examples in the evangelizing work, elders, their wives, and the rest of the congregation are encouraged to display zeal in their ministry. "Be zealous for the service," urged one circuit overseer. He added: "I have found that, generally, the more zealous a congregation is in the ministry, the fewer problems they experience." Another circuit overseer remarked: "I believe that if the elders work in the field with the brothers and sisters and help them to enjoy the ministry, this will result in peace of mind and the greatest satisfaction in serving Jehovah." The apostle

11. When it is needed, what can be the effect of an apology?

12. Why is zeal for the Christian ministry so significant?

Paul 'mustered up boldness to speak the good news of God to the Thessalonians with a great deal of struggling.' No wonder they had fond memories of his visit and preaching activity and longed to see him again! —1 Thessalonians 2:1, 2; 3:6.

¹³ When working with fellow Christians in the field ministry, a traveling overseer takes into account their circumstances and limitations. Although his suggestions may be helpful, he knows that some may be nervous when preaching with an experienced elder. In certain cases, therefore, encouragement may be more useful than counsel. When he accompanies publishers or pioneers on a Bible study, they may prefer that he conduct it. This is likely to acquaint them with some ways to improve their teaching methods.

¹⁴ Zealous traveling overseers stimulate zeal in others. One circuit overseer in Uganda walked through the thick forest for an hour in order to accompany a brother on a Bible study that was making little progress. During their walk it rained so heavily that they arrived soaked to the skin. When the family of six learned that their visitor was a traveling overseer, they were very impressed. They knew that ministers of their church would never show such interest in the flock. The next Sunday, they attended their first meeting and expressed a desire to become Jehovah's Witnesses.

¹⁵ In the Mexican state of Oaxaca, one circuit overseer made an effort not really expected of him. He arranged to stay in a prison cell for four nights in order to visit a group of seven inmates who had be-

come Kingdom publishers. For several days he accompanied these prisoners as they witnessed from cell to cell and conducted Bible studies. Because of the interest shown, some of these studies continued well into the night. "At the end of the visit, the inmates and I felt full of joy as a result of the mutual encouragement," writes this zealous circuit overseer.

¹⁶ *Traveling overseers try to be encouraging.* When Paul visited the congregations in Macedonia, he 'encouraged them with many a word.' (Acts 20:1, 2) Words of encouragement can be very helpful in directing both young and old toward spiritual goals. At one large branch office of the Watch Tower Society, an informal survey revealed that circuit overseers had encouraged nearly 20 percent of the volunteers to take up full-time service. By her fine example as a full-time Kingdom proclaimer, the traveling overseer's wife also proves to be a great source of encouragement.

¹⁷ Older ones and depressed souls are particularly in need of encouragement. One elderly circuit overseer writes: "The facet of my work that generates an unspeakable inner joy is the privilege of rendering aid to the inactive and feeble ones among God's flock. The words of Romans 1:11, 12 have special meaning for me, as I derive immense encouragement and strength while 'imparting some spiritual gift to such ones in order for them to be made firm.'"

Rewards of Their Joyful Work

¹⁸ Traveling overseers have the best interests of fellow believers at heart. They want to strengthen the congregations and

13. What does a traveling overseer take into account when working with fellow Christians in the field service?

14. Why can it be said that zealous traveling overseers stimulate zeal in others?

15. What fine experience was enjoyed by a zealous circuit overseer in Mexico?

16. Why is it so beneficial when traveling overseers and their wives provide encouragement?

17. How does one elderly circuit overseer feel about his privilege of rendering aid to others?

18. What Scriptural objectives do traveling overseers have?

build them up spiritually. (Acts 15:41) One traveling overseer works hard “to give encouragement, provide refreshment, and promote a desire to fulfill the ministry and continue living the truth.” (3 John 3) Another one seeks to stabilize fellow believers in the faith. (Colossians 2:6, 7) Remember that the traveling overseer is a “genuine yokefellow,” not a master over the faith of others. (Philippians 4:3; 2 Corinthians 1:24) His visit is an occasion for encouragement and extra activity, as well as an opportunity for the body of elders to review progress made and consider future goals. By his words and example, congregation publishers, pioneers, ministerial servants, and elders can expect to be built up and stimulated for the work ahead. (Compare 1 Thessalonians 5:11.) So, then, wholeheartedly support the circuit overseer’s visits, and take full advantage of the service rendered by the district overseer.

¹⁹ Traveling overseers and their wives are richly rewarded for their faithful service, and they can be confident that Jehovah will bless them for the good they do. (Proverbs 19:17; Ephesians 6:8) Georg and Magdalena are an elderly couple who served

19, 20. How have traveling overseers and their wives been rewarded for their faithful service?

How Would You Respond?

- ☐ Why can traveling overseers be viewed as “fine stewards”?
- ☐ What are some factors that help circuit and district overseers to accomplish much good?
- ☐ Why are humility and zeal so important for those engaging in the traveling work?
- ☐ What fine objectives do traveling overseers have?

for many years in the traveling work. At a convention in Luxembourg, Magdalena was approached by a person to whom she had given a witness over 20 years earlier. This Jewish woman’s interest in the truth was aroused by the Bible literature Magdalena left with her, and in time she was baptized. Georg was approached by a spiritual sister who remembered his visit to her home nearly 40 years ago. His enthusiastic presentation of the good news ultimately led both her and her husband to accept the truth. Needless to say, both Georg and Magdalena were overjoyed.

²⁰ Paul’s fruitful ministry in Ephesus brought him joy and may have moved him to quote Jesus’ words: “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.” (Acts 20:35) Since traveling work involves constant giving, those engaging in it experience happiness, especially when they become aware of the good results of their labor. One circuit overseer who helped a discouraged elder was told in a letter: “You have been a great ‘strengthening aid’ in my spiritual life—more than you know. . . . You will never fully know how much help you have been to a modern-day Asaph, whose ‘feet had almost turned aside.’”—Colossians 4:11; Psalm 73:2.

²¹ An elderly Christian who was in the circuit work for years likes to think of 1 Corinthians 15:58, where Paul urged: “Become steadfast, unmovable, always having plenty to do in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in connection with the Lord.” Traveling overseers surely have much to do in the Lord’s work. And how grateful we are that they serve so joyfully as faithful stewards of Jehovah’s undeserved kindness!

21. Why would you say that 1 Corinthians 15:58 applies to the activities of traveling overseers?

SEIZE THIS UNIQUE OPPORTUNITY!

PETER was well advanced in his medical studies when the Bible's message of salvation captured his interest. When he graduated and started to practice as a doctor in a hospital, his superiors continually encouraged him to specialize as a neurosurgeon. Here was an opportunity that many new doctors would seize without hesitation.

Yet, Peter* decided to forgo this opportunity. Why? Did he simply lack the ambition and drive needed? No, for Peter did give the offer careful thought. After becoming a dedicated, baptized Witness of Jehovah, he desired to spend as much time as possible in the various aspects of the Christian ministry. Once he qualified as a neurosurgeon, he reasoned, his profession would swallow more and more of his time and energy. Was he foolish to give up this distinctive prospect, or was he wise?

To some, Peter's decision may have seemed foolish. However, he took into account such Bible texts as Ephesians 5:15, 16. There the apostle Paul urged fellow Christians: "Keep strict watch that how

you walk is not as unwise but as wise persons, buying out the opportune time for yourselves, because the days are wicked."

Please note the expression "opportune time." It is translated from a Greek word used in the Bible mostly to refer to a time or period marked by certain features or appropriate for a specific activity. Here Paul stressed that Christians should make time for important matters. Indeed, they need to "make sure of the more important things." (Philippians 1:10) It is a question of setting priorities.

So, then, what is the divine purpose for our time? What is God's will for those who love him? Bible prophecies clearly identify our day as "the time of the end," or "the last days." (Daniel 12:4; 2 Timothy 3:1) Christ Jesus left no doubt about what would be of paramount importance for our day. He specifically said that before the end of this wicked system of things, 'this good news of the kingdom would be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations.' Only then would the end come. —Matthew 24:3, 14.

Therefore, we need to seize every



* A substitute name.

opportunity to preach the good news of the Kingdom and make disciples. (Matthew 28:19, 20) Since these activities are never-to-be-repeated, this is the last opportunity to give our all in this lifesaving work. "Now is the especially acceptable time." Indeed, "now is the day of salvation."—2 Corinthians 6:2.

Making a Wise Decision

Peter—the young man mentioned at the outset—carefully thought about his decision and weighed his options. He realized that it would not be wrong for him to study with a view to becoming a neurosurgeon. But what was most important to him? It was his activity in the Christian ministry, considering the urgency of this work. At the same time, he had obligations to fulfill. He was married and had to support his wife, who is participating in the preaching work full-time. (1 Timothy 5:8) Peter also had to repay debts associated with his education. What, then, did he decide to do?

Peter decided to specialize in radiology and to do ultrasound scans. This was work that would entail a normal workday. He would also receive his training during regular working hours. Yes, some might consider this a less prestigious position, but it would allow him more time to devote to spiritual pursuits.

Another consideration prompted Peter's decision. While not judging others who may have decided differently, he knew that becoming too involved in secular matters does pose a danger for a Christian. It can cause him to neglect spiritual responsibilities. This is illustrated by another example that revolved around employment.

A certain full-time Kingdom preach-

er was a trained artist. He was able to support himself financially by selling his paintings. While devoting most of his time to the all-important Christian ministry, he could thus support himself comfortably. However, a desire to further his artistic career began to grow. He became more involved in painting and the art world, left the full-time ministry, and eventually became totally inactive as far as the Kingdom-preaching activity was concerned. In time, he became involved in unscriptural conduct, resulting in his being no longer a part of the Christian congregation.—1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

Our Time Is Special

As those now serving Jehovah, surely we want to remain faithful to him. We know that we are living in the most extraordinary time in human history. In order to keep on serving God and to cope with present-day circumstances effectively, we may need to make various adjustments. We can compare this to harvesttime for a farmer. That is a period of special activity, when farm workers are expected to exert themselves more than usual and put in longer workdays. Why? Because the harvest must be gathered within a limited period of time.

There is only a very limited time left for the present wicked system of things. Now more than ever before, a true Christian needs to exert himself to follow Jesus' example and walk in his footsteps. His life course on earth clearly demonstrated what was of greatest importance to him. He said: "We must work the works of him that sent me while it is day; the night is coming when no man can work." (John 9:4) By saying that the night was coming, Je-

sus was referring to the time of his trial, impalement, and death, when his earthly ministry would end and he would be unable to engage in the works of his heavenly Father.

True, during his three-and-a-half-year ministry, Jesus spent some of his time performing miracles and curing the sick. Nevertheless, he used most of his time to preach the Kingdom message and to “preach a release to the captives” of false religion. (Luke 4:18; Matthew 4:17) Jesus put earnest effort into his ministry and also took time to train his disciples so that they could build on the foundation he had laid and effectively continue with the



preaching work. Jesus seized every opportunity to promote Kingdom interests and wanted his disciples to do the same thing. —Matthew 5:14-16; John 8:12.

Like Jesus, we who are his modern-day

followers need to see mankind's situation as Jehovah God does. Time is running out for this system of things, and God mercifully wants all to have the opportunity to gain salvation. (2 Peter 3:9) Therefore, would it not be wise to put all other pursuits in second place to the doing of Jehovah's will? (Matthew 6:25-33) Especially during such a special time as this, something that would normally be regarded as important may well become of lesser importance in our lives as Christians.

Will any of us ever regret putting God's will first in our lives? No indeed, for the Christian course of self-sacrifice is wonderfully rewarding. For instance, Jesus told his disciples: “Truly I say to you men, No one has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children or fields for my sake and for the sake of the good news who will not get a hundredfold now in this period of time, houses and brothers and sisters and mothers and children and fields, with persecutions, and in the coming system of things everlasting life.” —Mark 10:29, 30.

No one can place a monetary value on the rewards enjoyed by those who use their time to praise Jehovah and proclaim the Kingdom message. They enjoy so many blessings! These include true friends, the satisfaction of doing the divine will, God's smile of approval, and the prospect of endless life. (Revelation 21:3, 4) And what a blessing it is to help people spiritually and bring honor to Jehovah's holy name as his Witnesses! Without question, “buying out the opportune time” is a truly wise and rewarding course. Now as never before is the time to share in declaring the good news of God's Kingdom. Will you seize and hold on to this unique opportunity?

THE RIGHT TO INFORMED CONSENT REAFFIRMED

A RECENT sentence pronounced by the Judge for Preliminary Investigations of the Court of Messina, Italy, has reaffirmed that the medical wishes of an adult patient are binding upon doctors. The ruling was issued in a case involving one of Jehovah's Witnesses.

In January 1994, Antonino Stellario Lentini, a 64-year-old Witness hemophiliac patient, was rushed to a hospital in Taormina, Messina. Antonino's wife, Catena, pointed out to the hospital staff that as Jehovah's Witnesses she and her husband would not consent to blood transfusion treatment. (Acts 15:20, 28, 29) Their wishes were honored.

However, during transport to another health-care center, Antonino went into respiratory arrest and arrived in critical condition. Soon thereafter, he died. Catena was devastated, but she found great comfort in the Bible's promise of a resurrection. (Acts 24:15) Then, to her great surprise, the magistrates—perhaps misled by incorrect news propagated by the media—accused her of causing the death of her husband because she refused surgery for him that the doctors deemed imperative.

After more than a year, on July 11, 1995, Catena was acquitted, as she had committed no crime. In fact, the testimony of experts pointed out that, considering the condition of the patient, surgical intervention would have been useless anyway.

But the judge's statements got to the main issue. It is difficult to accept, he pointed out, the idea that medical personnel have to intervene when treatment is refused by the patient or by persons representing him. The medical deontological code in Italy, he added, "foresees the necessity of acquiring the informed consent of the interested person before any intervention." Thus, he stated that Catena "lawfully prevented her husband from being subjected to such an operation."

This judgment reaffirms the right of an adult to refuse medical treatment that conflicts with his or her wishes.



ARE YOU IMITATING OUR IMPARTIAL GOD?

IMPARTIALITY—where can it be found? There is One who is totally impartial, free from prejudice, favoritism, and discrimination. He is Jehovah God, the Creator of mankind. However, concerning humans, 19th-century English writer Charles Lamb candidly wrote: “I am, in plainer words, a bundle of prejudices—made up of likings and dislikings.”

When it comes to impartiality, human relations leave much to be desired. Many centuries ago wise King Solomon of Israel observed that “man has dominated man to his injury.” (Ecclesiastes 8:9) Racial hatred, national conflicts, and family feuds continue to proliferate. Therefore, is it realistic to believe that, on their own, humans can develop an impartial society?

Conscious effort is needed to control our attitudes and rid ourselves of any deep-rooted prejudices. (Ephesians 4:22-24) Without realizing it we may tend to carry attitudes that were formed by our social and educational environment and that were rooted in our family, racial, and national backgrounds. These seemingly mild inclinations are often deep-seated and pro-

mote attitudes that lead to being partial. Scottish jurist and editor Lord Francis Jeffrey even admitted: “There is nothing respecting which a man may be so long unconscious, as of the extent and strength of his prejudices.”

Lena* is one person who admits that conscious effort is needed to fight the inclination to be partial. To stifle feelings of prejudice within oneself, she says, “takes a lot of work because upbringing is a very strong influence.” Lena also acknowledges that constant reminders are needed.

Jehovah's Record of Impartiality

Jehovah is a perfect example of impartiality. From the opening pages of the Bible, we read how he manifested his impartiality in his dealings with humans. We can learn much from these excellent examples and reminders.

Jehovah showed impartiality in maneuvering matters so that the Jewish apostle Peter proclaimed the good news to Cornelius and other Gentiles in 36 C.E. At that time Peter said: “God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to him.”—Acts 10:34, 35.

In all his dealings with the human family, Jehovah has consistently demonstrated his impartiality. Christ Jesus said of his Father: “He makes his sun rise upon wicked people and good and makes it rain upon righteous people and unrighteous.” (Matthew 5:45) Further extolling Jehovah as an impartial God, Peter testified: “He is patient with you because he does not desire any to be destroyed but desires all to attain to repentance.”—2 Peter 3:9.

In Noah's day, when “the badness of man

* A substitute name.

was abundant in the earth and every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only bad all the time," Jehovah decreed the destruction of that world of mankind. (Genesis 6:5-7, 11, 12) However, at God's command and in full view of his contemporaries, Noah built an ark. While he and his sons constructed the ark, Noah was also "a preacher of righteousness." (2 Peter 2:5) Despite knowing the wicked heart inclination of that generation, Jehovah impartially sent them a clear message. He appealed to their minds and hearts by having Noah build and preach. They had every opportunity to respond, but instead they "took no note until the flood came and swept them all away."—Matthew 24:39.

What an excellent example of Jehovah's impartiality! In these critical last days, it moves God's servants to proclaim the good news of the Kingdom with the same impartiality. Furthermore, they do not hold back from declaring the day of Jehovah's vengeance. In full public view, they present Jehovah's message without partiality for everyone to hear.—Isaiah 61:1, 2.

Jehovah's promises to the patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob made it evident that he is an impartial God. Through their specific family line would come the appointed One by whom 'all nations of the earth would certainly bless themselves.' (Genesis 22:

18; 26:4; 28:14) Christ Jesus proved to be that appointed One. By means of Jesus' death and resurrection, Jehovah provided the way of salvation for all obedient mankind. Yes, the benefits of Christ's ransom sacrifice are available without partiality.

In the days of Moses, Jehovah's impartiality manifested itself in a most interesting way in connection with the daughters of Zelophehad. These five women faced a dilemma pertaining to the inheritance of their father in the Promised Land. This was so because it was customary in Israel for land inheritance to be passed on through a man's sons. However, Zelophehad died without leaving a son to receive an inheritance. The five daughters of Zelophehad therefore brought their request for impartial treatment before Moses, saying: "Why should the name of our father be taken away from the midst of his family because he had no son? O give us a possession in the midst of our father's broth-



The apostle Peter learned that God is not partial

ers." Jehovah listened to their pleas and instructed Moses: "In case any man should die without his having a son, you must then cause his inheritance to pass to his daughter."—Numbers 27:1-11.

What a loving impartial precedent! To ensure that the tribal inheritance not be passed on to another tribe when the daughters got married, they were required to marry only in "the family of the tribe of their fathers."—Numbers 36:5-12.

Further insight into Jehovah's impartiality is seen in the days of the judge and prophet Samuel. Jehovah commissioned him to anoint a new king of the tribe of Judah in the family of Jesse the Bethlehemite. But Jesse had eight sons. Who would be anointed as king? Samuel was impressed by Eliab's physical stature. However, Jehovah is not swayed by outward appearances. He told Samuel: "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature . . . For not the way man sees is the way God sees, because mere man sees what appears to the eyes; but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is." David, the youngest son of Jesse, was chosen.—1 Samuel 16:1, 6-13.

Learning From Jehovah's Impartiality

Christian elders do well to imitate Jehovah by looking at the spiritual qualities of a fellow believer. It is easy to judge an individual by our own standards, allowing our personal feelings to obscure our judgment. As one elder put it, "I try to deal with others in a way that pleases Jehovah, not based on my own preconceived ideas." How beneficial it is for all of Jehovah's servants to use his Word as their standard!

The foregoing Biblical examples help us fight lingering feelings of racial or nation-

alistic prejudice. By imitating Jehovah's impartiality, we protect the Christian congregation from prejudice, discrimination, and favoritism.

The apostle Peter learned that "God is not partial." (Acts 10:34) Favoritism is an enemy of impartiality and violates the principles of love and unity. Jesus appealed to the poor, the weak, and the lowly, and he made their load light. (Matthew 11:28-30) He stood out in sharp contrast to the Jewish religious leaders, who lorded it over the people, burdening them with a heavy load of rules. (Luke 11:45, 46) Doing this and showing favoritism to the rich and prominent certainly did not harmonize with Christ's teachings.—James 2:1-4, 9.

Today, Christian elders submit to Christ's headship and show impartiality to all of Jehovah's dedicated people. As they 'shepherd the flock of God in their care,' they refrain from showing favoritism because of economic status, personality differences, or family ties. (1 Peter 5:2) By imitating the impartial God and heeding his warning against acts of favoritism, Christian elders promote the spirit of impartiality in the congregation.

The Christian congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses is an international brotherhood. It is living evidence that a prejudice-free, impartial society can be a reality under the direction of Jesus Christ. The Witnesses have "put on the new personality which was created according to God's will in true righteousness and loyalty." (Ephesians 4:24) Yes, they are learning from the perfect example of the impartial God, Jehovah, and have the prospect of eternal life in the new world free of all partiality.—2 Peter 3:13.

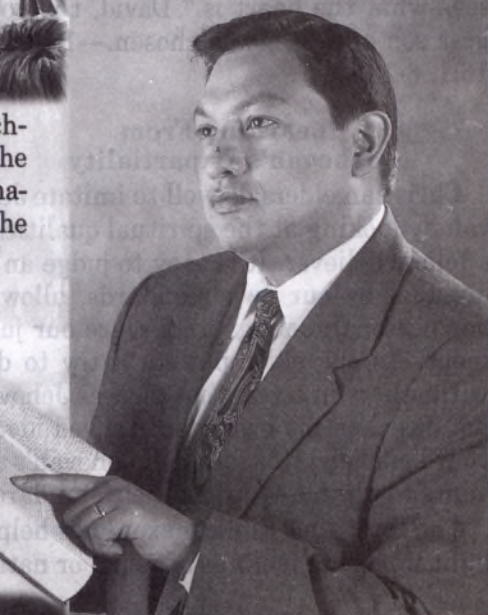
WOULD YOU HAVE RECOGNIZED THE MESSIAH?



JESUS CHRIST spent three and a half years preaching God's Word among the Israelites. But by the time his earthly ministry came to a close, the majority of his contemporaries had rejected him as the Messiah, or God's promised "Anointed One." Why?

The Bible helps us to identify several reasons why first-century Jews did not acknowledge Jesus as the Messiah. Three of these reasons hold many back from acknowledging Jesus' present-day position as the ruling Messianic King.

**Never turn your back on the evidence
that Jesus is the Messianic King**



“We Want to See a Sign”

One reason why the first-century Jews did not recognize the Messiah was their refusal to accept Scriptural signs pointing to his Messiahship. On occasion, people listening to Jesus demanded that he perform a sign to prove that he was from God. For instance, Matthew 12:38 reports that some of the scribes and Pharisees said: “Teacher, we want to see a sign from you.” Had Jesus not already shown them signs? Of course he had.

By that time Jesus had already performed a number of miracles. He had turned water into wine, had healed a dying boy, had cured Peter’s sick mother-in-law, had made a leprous man clean, had enabled a paralyzed man to walk, had restored the health of a man who had been sick for 38 years, had returned a man’s withered hand to normal, had relieved many people of their grievous diseases, had healed the slave of an army officer, had brought a widow’s son back from the dead, and had cured a blind and speechless man. These miracles had occurred in Cana, Capernaum, Jerusalem, and Nain. Moreover, news about such miracles spread throughout Judea and the surrounding country.—John 2:1-12; 4:46-54; Matthew 8:14-17; 8:1-4; 9:1-8; John 5:1-9; Matthew 12:9-14; Mark 3:7-12; Luke 7:1-10; 7:11-17; Matthew 12:22.

Clearly, there was no shortage of signs proving that Jesus was the Messiah. Though he performed so many signs before the people, they did not put faith in him. Those who saw the proof that Jesus was sent by God but did not acknowledge him as the Messiah were spiritually blind. Their hearts were hard and impervious to the truth.—John 12:37-41.

What about our day? Some people proclaim, “I believe only what I see with my own eyes.” But is that really a wise course to take? Bible prophecy indicates that Jesus has already been enthroned as heavenly

King in the Messianic Kingdom. Since he is invisible, we need a sign to help us discern his rulership, which marked the start of the last days of this wicked system of things. Do you recognize the sign?—Matthew 24:3.

According to the Bible, the start of Christ’s rulership as Messianic King would be marked by warfare, earthquakes, food shortages, and pestilences on an unprecedented scale. In “the last days,” human relations would be characterized by selfishness, greed, and lack of restraint. (2 Timothy 3:1-5; Matthew 24:6, 7; Luke 21:10, 11) Apart from chronological proof, more than 20 different features of the last days pinpoint the beginning of the Messiah’s reign in 1914.—See *The Watchtower* of March 1, 1993, page 5.

“Money Lovers”

Materialism was another reason why the Jews rejected Jesus as the Messiah. Attaching too much importance to wealth hindered many from following Jesus. For instance, the Pharisees were known to be “money lovers.” (Luke 16:14) Consider the case of a wealthy young ruler who approached Jesus and asked how to gain everlasting life. “Observe the commandments continually,” was Jesus’ reply. “I have kept all these; what yet am I lacking?” asked the young man, apparently sensing that more was needed than keeping certain laws. “Sell your belongings and give to the poor and you will have treasure in heaven, and come be my follower,” Jesus told him. What an opportunity—to be a disciple of the Messiah! Yet the ruler turned away, grieved. Why? Because treasure on earth was more important to him than treasure in heaven.—Matthew 19:16-22.

The situation has not changed. Becoming a genuine follower of the Messianic King means putting spiritual interests before

everything else, including earthly belongings. For any who have a materialistic outlook, this is a challenge. For example, a missionary couple in one Eastern land talked to a woman about the Bible. Believing that she would like to learn more about Jehovah God and his Son, Jesus Christ, the couple offered her *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* How did she react? "Will these magazines help me to earn more money?" she asked. The woman was more interested in material things than in spiritual matters.

The same couple studied the Bible with a young man who started to attend meetings at the Kingdom Hall. "You are wasting your time," his parents told him. "You should get a second job in the evening and earn more money." How sad it is when parents encourage their children to put material things ahead of learning about the Messianic King! "For all his wealth the ruler cannot buy ten thousand years of life," says a Chinese proverb.

Many have come to realize that learning about and following the Messianic King leaves no room for a love of money. A Witness of Jehovah who used to have her own business with high earnings, said: "Having a lot of money is very pleasant but not necessary. Money is not what makes a person happy." She is now a member of the Bethel family at

a European branch of the Watch Tower Society.

"Fear of the Jews"

Fear of man was yet another reason why the Jews did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. Publicly acknowledging his Messiahship meant putting their reputation at risk. For some that price was too high. Consider Nicodemus, a member of the Jewish high court called the Sanhedrin. Impressed by Jesus' signs and teachings, he admitted: "Rabbi, we know that you as a teacher have come from God; for no one can perform these signs that you perform unless God is with him." Yet Nicodemus called on Jesus under cover of darkness, probably to avoid being recognized by other Jews. —John 3:1, 2.

For many who heard Jesus speak, the approval of men was more important than that of God. (John 5:44) When Jesus was in Jerusalem for the Festival of Booths in 32 C.E., "there was a lot of *subdued* talk about him among the crowds." No one spoke about Jesus openly "because of the fear of the Jews." (John 7:10-13) Even the parents of a man whom Jesus cured of blindness could not bring themselves to acknowledge the miracle as coming from God's representative. They too were "in fear of the Jews." —John 9:13-23.

Today, some realize that Jesus is now reigning as Messianic King in heaven, but they are afraid to acknowledge this openly. For them the price of losing their standing with others is too high. In Germany, for instance, a Witness of Jehovah had a Bible discussion with a man who admitted: "What you Witnesses preach about the Bible is true. But if I became a Witness today, by tomorrow everyone would know about it. What would they think at work, in the neighbor-

In Our Next Issue

When Natural Disasters Strike

**Parents, Find Pleasure
in Your Children**

Youths Who Remember Their Creator



Learning about the Messiah often means overcoming fear of what others might say

hood, and at the club my family and I belong to? I could not put up with that.”

What causes fear of man? Pride, love of popularity among family and friends, dread of ridicule and humiliation, anxiety over being different from the majority. Such feelings prove to be a test particularly for those who start to study the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses. For example, one young woman was thrilled to learn about the Paradise that the Messianic Kingdom will establish on earth under the rulership of Jesus Christ. But she was an ardent disco fan, and fear of man hindered her from talking to others about this hope. Finally, she mustered up courage to talk freely about the Bible. Her disco friends cast her off, but her husband and her parents showed interest. The woman and her mother were eventually baptized, and her husband and her father began to study the Bible. What a reward for overcoming fear of man!

Do You Really Recognize the Messiah?

When Jesus was dying on the torture stake, some of his disciples were present. They had recognized him as the foretold Messiah. Also present were Jewish rulers, who, as it were, still demanded a sign. “Let him save himself, if this one is the Christ [or Messiah] of God, the Chosen One.” (Luke 23:35) Would they never cease asking for a sign? Jesus had performed dozens of miracles. Additionally, his birth, ministry, trial, execution, and resurrection fulfilled many Hebrew Scripture prophecies.—See *“All Scripture Is Inspired of God and Beneficial,”* published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., pages 343-4.

Passersby reproached Jesus, having rejected evidence of his Messiahship. (Matthew 27:39, 40) Soldiers materialistically apportioned Jesus’ clothing among themselves, casting lots for his inner garment. (John 19:23, 24) Fear of man played a role in some cases. For instance, consider Joseph of Arimathea, a member of the Sanhedrin. He “was a disciple of Jesus but a secret one out of his fear of the Jews.” After the Messiah’s death, Joseph and Nicodemus cared for Jesus’ body. Joseph thus overcame his fear of man.—John 19:38-40.

If you had been living in the first century, would you have recognized Jesus as the Messiah? Doing so would have required that you accept Scriptural evidence, reject materialistic thinking, and not succumb to the fear of man. In these last days, each of us should ask himself, ‘Do I recognize Jesus now as the heavenly Messianic King?’ Soon he will take over earth’s affairs. When that happens, will you be among those who really recognize Jesus Christ as the promised Messiah?

'They Are Interested in Helping Others'

THAT is what a New York City policeman said about Jehovah's Witnesses. He was speaking to Kathleen, one of the full-time volunteers serving at the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York.

During her noon break, on a warm and sunny autumn day, Kathleen sat on a bench on the nearby Promenade. She was listening to an audiocassette player equipped with headphones. At a heliport across the East River, preparations were under way for the departure of the pope, who had been visiting the city. Security was tight everywhere, and a number of policemen were patrolling the Promenade. One of them approached Kathleen and asked what she was doing. Kathleen replied: "I am listening to a Russian-language tape. You see, I am one of Jehovah's Witnesses, and I want to learn Russian in order to share the good news of God's Kingdom with Russian-speaking people who have come to live in the city."

The policeman responded that he had grown to admire Jehovah's Witnesses during his last 15 years as a patrol officer in New York City. He said: "I see Jehovah's Witnesses as an organized religion whose members are sincerely interested in helping others in the community."

Jehovah's Witnesses are known worldwide for the door-to-door preaching work they do. (Acts 20:20) While they point to God's Kingdom as the only solution for the problems that plague mankind, they also help people improve their quality of life by encouraging them to apply Bi-



ble principles in their daily lives. For example, the Witnesses urge parents to provide an environment at home that is conducive to learning. They exhort individuals to be honest and law-abiding, encouraging them to acquire skills and qualities that an employer will find valuable.

Yes, Jehovah's Witnesses are very much interested in helping people in the community to improve their lives.