MAY 15, 1999

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Spend TIME With Your FAMILY!

THE WATCHTOWER®

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May 15, 1999 | Average Printing Each Issue: 22,328,000 | Vol. 120, No. 10

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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Now published in 130 languages.

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The Bible translation used is the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References,* unless otherwise indicated.

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Publication of "The Watchtower" is part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations.

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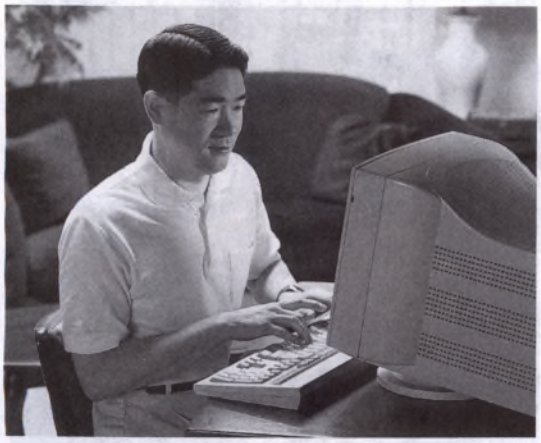
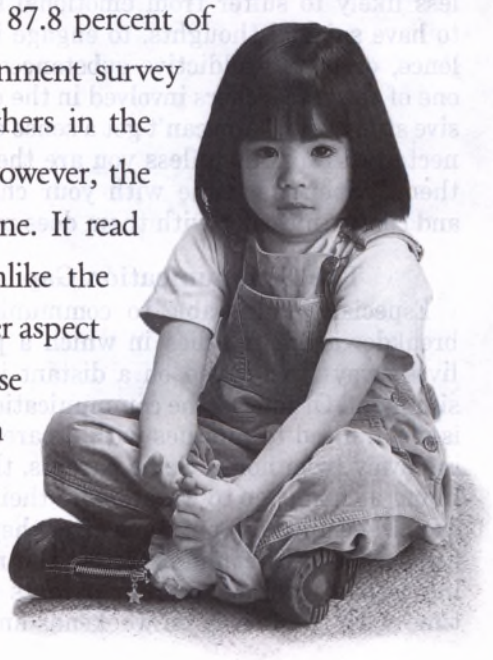
The Watchtower (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY, and at additional mailing offices. **Postmaster:** Send address changes to Watchtower, **Wallkill, NY 12589.**

Printed in U.S.A.



DO YOU SPEND TIME WITH YOUR FAMILY?

"JAPANESE Fathers Are Loved—Though Busy Working and Not Playing With Their Children." Some years ago this headline appeared in the *Mainichi Shimbun*. The article reported that 87.8 percent of the Japanese children taking part in a government survey expressed the desire to take care of their fathers in the future. In the English edition of the paper, however, the same item appeared under a different headline. It read "Fathers and Sons: A Case of Neglect." Unlike the Japanese edition, the article highlighted another aspect of the same survey: Each working day, Japanese fathers were spending only 36 minutes with their children. In comparison, fathers in West Germany were spending 44 minutes with their children on a weekday, and in the United States, the figure was 56 minutes.



Youths who have close relationships with their parents are less likely to suffer from emotional stress

It is not just fathers who spend little time with their children. More and more mothers work outside the home. For example, many single mothers have to work secularly to support the family. As a result, the amount of time that parents—fathers and mothers alike—spend with their children is diminished.

A 1997 study of more than 12,000 American teenagers found that youths who have close relationships with their parents are less likely to suffer from emotional stress, to have suicidal thoughts, to engage in violence, or to use addictive substances. And one of the researchers involved in the extensive study said: "You can't get a sense of connectedness to kids unless you are there for them." Spending time with your children and communicating with them does matter.

The Communication Gap

Especially vulnerable to communication breakdown are families in which a parent lives away from home on a distant job assignment. Of course, the communication gap is not limited to families with a parent living away from home. Some parents, though living at home, go to work before their children wake up and come home after they have gone to bed. To compensate for the resulting lack of contact, certain parents spend time with the family on weekends and holidays. They talk about spending "quality" time with their children.

Yet, is the lack in quantity offset by quality? Researcher Laurence Steinberg answers: "In general, kids who spend more time with their parents do better than kids that spend less time. It seems to be very difficult to make up for that lack of time. The idea of quality time has been oversold." That is exactly how a Burmese woman feels. Her husband—a typical Japanese man—comes home from work at one or two o'clock every morning. Although he spends time with his family on the weekends, his wife says: "Being at home on Saturdays and Sundays cannot fill the gap of not being with the family for the rest of the week. . . . Can you skip all meals on weekdays and eat all the meals for the week on Saturdays and Sundays?"

Conscientious Effort Needed

Maintaining good communication in the family is easier said than done. The demands

Good communication pays rich dividends in family life

of making a living and providing for the family do not make it easy for a father or a working mother to spend time with the family. Many whose circumstances require them to be away from home communicate regularly by making telephone calls or writing letters. But whether together at home or not, conscientious effort is needed to maintain good family communication.

Parents who shy away from communicating with their family have to pay for their negligence. A father who spent little time with his family, not even eating with them, was faced with serious consequences. His son became violent, and his daughter was caught shoplifting. As the father was getting ready to go to the golf course one Sunday morning, the son reacted explosively. "Is mother the only parent in this home?" he shouted. "Mom decides everything in the family. Dad, you never . . . ," the boy lamented.

Those words made the father think. Finally he decided that, as a start, he should eat breakfast with the family. At first, it was just him and his wife. Gradually, the children joined in, and the breakfast table became a seedbed of communication. This led to family dinners together. Thus, the man was on the way to saving his family from a complete breakdown.

Help From God's Word

The Bible encourages parents to take time to communicate with their children. Through the prophet Moses, the Israelites were instructed: "Listen, O Israel: Jehovah our God is one Jehovah. And you must love Jehovah your God with all your heart and all your soul and all your vital force. And these words that I am commanding you today must prove to be on your heart; and you must inculcate them in your son and speak of them when you sit in your house and when you walk on the road and when you lie down and when you get up." (Deuteronomy 6:4-7) Yes, those of us who are parents

As you work together with your child, you can communicate and provide valuable training

need to take the initiative in spending time with our family if we are to inculcate God's words in the children's minds and hearts.

Interestingly, the previously mentioned 1997 survey of more than 12,000 American adolescents revealed that "among the nearly 88% . . . of the population who reported having a religion, the perceived importance of religion and prayer was protective." True Christians realize that proper religious instruction at home protects youths from such things as substance abuse, emotional distress, suicide, violence, and so forth.

Some parents feel that it is hard to find time for their family. Especially is this so of single mothers, who would gladly spend time with their children but who must work secularly. How can they squeeze out precious time to be with their family? "Safeguard practical wisdom and thinking ability," urges the Bible. (Proverbs 3:21) Parents can use "thinking ability" to make time for the family. How?

If you are a working mother who feels exhausted after a day's work, how about asking your children to prepare a meal with you? Such time spent together would provide opportunity to become closer to one another. At first, involving your children may take more time. Soon, though, you will find it enjoyable and even time saving.

You may be a father with a full list of things to do on weekends. Why not care for some of these chores with your children? You can communicate with them as you work together and at the same time give them valuable training. The Bible's admonition to inculcate God's words in your offspring encourages you to speak to them 'when sitting in your house, walking on the road'—indeed, at every opportunity. It is a display of "practical wisdom" to communicate with your children as you work together.

Spending time with your family pays long-term dividends. "With those consulting together there is wisdom," says a Bible proverb. (Proverbs 13:10) By taking time to communicate with your family, you will be in a good position to give them wise direction in the struggles of everyday life. Such direction given now can save a lot of time and heartache in the future. Furthermore, it can contribute to your happiness and theirs. To give such direction, you need to tap the rich reservoir of wisdom that is found in God's Word, the Bible. Use it to teach your children and to guide the steps of your family.—Psalm 119:105.

A HISTORIC VISIT MAKES AN ISLAND REJOICE

Cuba, a beautiful island in the Caribbean, recently experienced an unprecedented season of spiritual refreshment. The close of 1998 brought a long-awaited blessing for Jehovah's Witnesses living in this West Indian country. For the first time in more than 30 years, members of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses paid a visit, and they were accompanied by 15 other delegates. The visitors were citizens of Australia, Austria, Belgium, Great Britain, Italy, New Zealand, and Puerto Rico.

THIS was a historic event for the 82,258 Kingdom publishers there and the 87,890 who joined them to celebrate the Lord's Evening Meal in the spring of 1998.

From December 1 to 7, 1998, Lloyd Barry, John Barr, and Gerrit Lösch visited the Bethel Home in Havana and attended some of the "God's Way of Life" District Conventions held in Cuba. They were happy to be able to meet with traveling elders and become better acquainted with Cuban public officials.

"This was a theocratic highlight of a lifetime for me and my wife," said John Barr. "Our dear brothers and sisters in Cuba are so full of zeal for the truth! I came away feeling that our worldwide brotherhood is truly precious!" "This momentous week helped me to have a better understanding of the

Many families attended the special "God's Way of Life" District Conventions in Cuba

The Bethel Home in Havana was reopened in 1994

situation of our brothers there," added Lloyd Barry.

During the past five years, Jehovah's Witnesses have been granted greater freedom of worship in Cuba, and comments by Cuban authorities lead one to believe that they wish this trend to continue.

In September 1994, a printing operation was established in the Bethel Home in Havana. Once again, Jehovah's Witnesses were able to meet openly and to witness from house to house. Later, in 1998, the authorities permitted this visit of an international delegation of 18 Jehovah's Witnesses, including three members of the Governing Body.

Happy Reunion

When the delegation arrived at the José Martí airport in Havana, they were hospitably received by a contingent of public officials and a group from the Bethel Home, among them a brother who remembered the last visit to Cuba of a Governing Body member—Milton Henschel—in 1961. The brother was then 12 years old; he is now a traveling overseer.

When the delegates arrived at the Bethel Home, they were greeted with bouquets of gladioluses, roses, jasmine, and yellow and red daisies, grown by a brother especially for this occasion. Tears flowed freely as the Bethel family welcomed the delegates. Later, they shared a meal of Cuban roasted pork, rice and beans, salad, yucca with *mojo* (a sauce made of garlic and olive oil), and fresh fruit. After the meal each member of the Governing Body gave an upbuilding talk on the treasure of Bethel service. Brother Lösch's comments were particularly moving, as he spoke to the brothers in Spanish. The Bethel family is made up of 48 regular volunteer workers and 18 temporary helpers.

Although books and Bibles are printed in Italy for the brothers in Cuba, black-and-white editions of the *Watchtower* and *Awake!* magazines are produced in the country itself, on two mimeograph machines. Long hours and repetitive manual work in cramped quarters are required to

Governing Body members sign gift Bibles for public officials

produce all the magazines that are needed. The volunteers value their treasure of service to Jehovah in a very special way.—2 Corinthians 4:7.

Convention Highlights

The 18-member delegation divided into three groups so as to attend district conventions held at three locations—Havana, Camagüey, and Holguín. On each of the three days, a large group of brothers and sisters, including many elders and pioneers, were invited to attend at each location. The local Witnesses had been told that this would be a special occasion, but they did not know that members of the Governing Body would be in attendance. Imagine their surprise to see these dear brothers and their wives step off the rented buses on Friday morning!

The conventions were held in open-air facilities constructed by the brothers with the permission of the authorities. At the Havana convention site, engraved on one of the entry stones was the citation "Psalm 133:1." This reminded the brothers of the words found in that text: "Look! How good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!" Certainly, during the convention, there was good and pleasant Christian fellowship in that location.

The visitors remarked on the excellent delivery of the talks and the interviews, and they were impressed by the presentation of the drama, which was based on the Bible story of Daniel chapter 3, set in ancient Babylon. A sister commented: "All the actors were superb, and the voice synchronization was so well done that you were unaware that the sound had been pretaped. . . . The evil Babylonian looked really evil, and the three Hebrews were firm and determined."

Representatives of the Office of Religious Affairs and other officials of the government who came to see the conventions commended the brothers on their organization and fine conduct. Brother Barry expressed his sincere gratitude for the excellent treatment extended to the visiting delegates by the Cuban authorities. With standing ovations, often lasting several minutes, the brothers expressed their appreciation for the talks and also for the authorities' permitting the conventions. "This is more than we expected—a small-scale international convention!" said one Christian family. "It has been wonderful, for it has given evidence of Jehovah's great power to make his promises come true."

The conventions also provided an opportunity for others to get to know the Witnesses better. One of the bus drivers attended the convention on Saturday and again on Sunday. He said that he had heard many things about Jehovah's Witnesses, but he now knew that they are good, peaceful people.

"Things We Shall Never Forget"

The people of Cuba impressed the delegates with their warmth and friendliness. Cubans are industrious, principled, and kind. "More than once, total strangers offered to help us," said one delegate.

The delegates were deeply impressed by the faith, happiness, and love displayed by fellow Witnesses in Cuba. In spite of tremendous obstacles, they have made Jehovah their stronghold. (Psalm 91:2) John Barr said: "So many things pleasantly surprised me on this, my first visit to Cuba—the beauty of the country, the pleasant temperament of the people I met, and above all, the sheer exuberance of the Cuban Witnesses. Never in my life have I heard such heartfelt singing of our Kingdom songs and such prolonged applause when spiritual matters touched their hearts! These are things we shall never forget. We shall always cherish them."

Psalm 97:1 says: "Let the many islands rejoice." Truly, Jehovah's Witnesses on the island of Cuba rejoice over their increased freedom to worship God and over the historic visit of this international delegation.

HAPPY THAT JEHOVAH SHOWS US HIS WAY

"As for the true God, perfect is his way; the saying of Jehovah is a refined one."—2 SAMUEL 22:31.

ALL humans have a fundamental need for guidance. Indeed, we need help in making our way through life. True, Jehovah has endowed us with a measure of intelligence and a conscience to help us to discern right from wrong. But our conscience needs to be trained if it is to be a reliable guide. (Hebrews 5:14) And our mind needs correct information—as well as training to evaluate that information—if we are to make good decisions. (Proverbs 2: 1-5) Even then, because of life's uncertainties, our decisions may fail to turn out as desired. (Ecclesiastes 9:11) In ourselves, we have no reliable way to know what the future holds.

[2] For these and many other reasons, the prophet Jeremiah wrote: "I well know, O Jehovah, that to earthling man his way does not belong. It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step." (Jeremiah 10:23) Jesus Christ, the greatest man who ever lived, accepted direction. He said: "The Son cannot do a single thing of his own initiative, but only what he beholds the Father doing. For whatever things that One does, these things the Son also does in like manner." (John 5:19) How wise, then, to imitate Jesus and look to Jehovah for help in directing our steps! King David sang: "As for the true God, perfect is his way; the saying of Jehovah is a refined one. A shield he is to all those taking refuge in him." (2 Samuel 22:31) If we seek to walk in Jehovah's way rather than follow our own wisdom, we will have perfect guidance. Rejecting God's way leads to calamity.

1, 2. (a) For what do all humans have a fundamental need? (b) Whose example would we do well to imitate?

Jehovah Shows the Way

[3] Consider the case of Adam and Eve. Sinless though they were, they needed direction. Jehovah did not leave Adam to plan everything for himself in the beautiful garden of Eden. Instead, God gave him work to do. First, Adam had to name the animals. Then, Jehovah gave Adam and Eve long-term goals. They were to subdue the earth, fill it with their offspring, and care for earth's animals. (Genesis 1:28) This would be a huge task, but the end result would be a worldwide paradise filled with a perfect human race living in harmony with the animal creation. What a wonderful prospect! Further, while Adam and Eve were faithfully walking in Jehovah's way, they would have communication with him. (Compare Genesis 3:8.) What a marvelous privilege—to have an ongoing, personal relationship with the Creator!

[4] Jehovah forbade the first human pair to

3. How did Jehovah guide Adam and Eve, offering them what prospects?

4. How did Adam and Eve betray a lack of trust and loyalty, and with what disastrous results?

eat of the tree of the knowledge of good and bad that was in Eden, and this gave them an immediate opportunity to demonstrate their obedience—their desire to walk in Jehovah's way. (Genesis 2:17) Soon, though, that obedience was tested. When Satan came with his deceptive words, Adam and Eve needed to show loyalty to Jehovah and to have trust in His promises if they were to remain obedient. Unhappily, they lacked loyalty and trust. When Satan offered Eve independence and falsely accused Jehovah of lying, she was deceived and disobeyed God. Adam followed her into sin. (Genesis 3:1-6; 1 Timothy 2:14) Their resulting loss was immense. Walking in Jehovah's way would have given them ever-increasing joy as they progressively accomplished his will. Instead, their lives were filled with disappointment and pain until death overtook them.—Genesis 3:16-19; 5:1-5.

5 Nevertheless, Jehovah did not change his purpose that some day the earth will be a paradise home for perfect, sinless humans. (Psalm 37:11, 29) And he has never failed to give perfect guidance to those who walk in his way and hope to see the fulfillment of that promise. For those of us with ears to hear, Jehovah's voice is behind us, saying: "This is the way. Walk in it, you people." —Isaiah 30:21.

Some Walked in Jehovah's Way

6 According to the Bible record, only a minority of the offspring of Adam and Eve walked in Jehovah's way. Abel was the first of these. Although he suffered a premature death, he died in Jehovah's favor and thus has the sure prospect of sharing in the "resurrection of . . . the righteous" in God's due time. (Acts 24:15) He will see the eventual fulfillment of Jehovah's great purpose for the earth and mankind. (Hebrews 11:4) Another who walked in Jehovah's way was Enoch, whose prophecy about the final end of this system of things is preserved in the book of Jude. (Jude 14, 15) Enoch too failed to live out his potential life span. (Genesis 5: 21-24) Still, "he had the witness that he had pleased God well." (Hebrews 11:5) When he left the earthly scene, he, like Abel, had the certain prospect of a resurrection, and he will be among those who will see Jehovah's purposes fulfilled.

7 As the pre-Flood world sank deeper into wickedness, obedience to Jehovah became more and more a test of loyalty. Toward the end of that world, only one small group was found walking in Jehovah's way. Noah and his family listened to God and trusted what he said. They faithfully accomplished the tasks set before them and refused to be sucked into the evil practices of the world of those days. (Genesis 6:5-7, 13-16; Hebrews 11:7; 2 Peter 2:5) We can be grateful for their loyal and trusting obedience. Because of it, they survived the Flood and became our ancestors.—Genesis 6:22; 1 Peter 3:20.

8 In time, Jehovah made a covenant with the descendants of faithful Jacob, and they became his special nation. (Exodus 19:5, 6) Jehovah supplied direction for his covenant people through a written Law, a priesthood, and ongoing prophetic guidance. But it was up to the Israelites to follow that direction. Jehovah had his prophet tell the Israelites: "See, I am putting before you today blessing and malediction: the blessing, provided

5. What is Jehovah's long-range purpose, and how does he help faithful humans to see its fulfillment?

6. What two men of early times walked in Jehovah's way, and with what results?

7. How did Noah and his family show loyalty to Jehovah and trust in him?

8. For the nation of Israel, what was involved in walking in God's way?

you will obey the commandments of Jehovah your God that I am commanding you today; and the malediction, if you will not obey the commandments of Jehovah your God and you do turn aside from the way about which I am commanding you today, so as to walk after other gods whom you have not known."—Deuteronomy 11:26-28.

Why Some Abandoned Jehovah's Way

9 As with Adam and Eve, the Israelites needed to trust in Jehovah and be loyal to him if they were to remain obedient. Israel was a small nation surrounded by contentious neighbors. To the southwest were Egypt and Ethiopia. To the northeast were Syria and Assyria. In the immediate vicinity were Philistia, Ammon, Moab, and Edom. At one time or another, all of these proved to be enemies of Israel. Moreover, all of them practiced false religion, characterized by worship of idol gods, astrology, and in some cases gross sexual rites and the cruel sacrifice of children. Israel's neighbors looked to their gods to provide large families, fertile harvests, and victory in warfare.

10 Israel alone worshiped one God, Jehovah. He promised them the blessings of large families, rich harvests, and security against their enemies if they would obey his laws. (Deuteronomy 28:1-14) Unhappily, many in Israel failed to do this. Of those who did walk in Jehovah's way, many suffered for their loyalty. Some were even tortured, mocked, scourged, imprisoned, stoned, and killed by fellow Israelites. (Acts 7:51, 52; Hebrews 11:35-38) What a test that must have been for the faithful! Why, though, did so many stray from Jehovah's way? Two examples from Israel's history help us to see their wrong thinking.

9, 10. Because of what situation did the Israelites need to trust in Jehovah and cultivate loyalty to him?

Ahaz' Bad Example

11 Ahaz reigned over the southern kingdom of Judah in the eighth century B.C.E. His reign was not peaceful. On one occasion, Syria and the northern kingdom of Israel united in war against him, and "his heart and the heart of his people began to quiver." (Isaiah 7:1, 2) However, when Jehovah offered support and invited Ahaz to put him to the test, Ahaz flatly refused! (Isaiah 7:10-12) As a result, Judah lost the war and suffered many casualties.—2 Chronicles 28:1-8.

12 While Ahaz refused to put Jehovah to the test, he was not above asking help from the king of Assyria. Still, Judah continued to suffer at the hands of its neighbors. When Assyria too turned against Ahaz and "caused him distress," the king "began to sacrifice to the gods of Damascus that were striking him, and he went on to say: 'Because the gods of the kings of Syria are helping them, to them I shall sacrifice, that they may help me.'"—2 Chronicles 28:20, 23.

13 At a later time, Jehovah would say to Israel: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself, the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk. O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea." (Isaiah 48:17, 18) In turning to the gods of Syria, Ahaz showed how far he was from 'treading in the way in which he should walk.' He was completely misled by the thinking of the nations, looking to their false sources of security instead of to Jehovah.

11, 12. (a) When threatened by Syria, what did Ahaz refuse to do? (b) To what two sources did Ahaz look for security?

13. What did Ahaz show by turning to Syria's gods?

Ahaz looked to Syria's gods rather than to Jehovah

[14] The gods of the nations, including those of Syria, had long been shown to be "valueless gods." (Isaiah 2:8) Earlier, during the reign of King David, Jehovah's superiority over Syria's gods was clearly seen when the Syrians became David's servants. (1 Chronicles 18:5, 6) Jehovah alone, "the God of gods and the Lord of lords, the God great, mighty and fear-inspiring," can give real security. (Deuteronomy 10:17) Ahaz, though, turned his back on Jehovah and looked to the gods of the nations for security. The result was disastrous for Judah.—2 Chronicles 28:24, 25.

The Jews With Jeremiah in Egypt

[15] Because of the extreme disloyalty of his people, in 607 B.C.E., Jehovah allowed the Babylonians to destroy Jerusalem and its temple. Most of the nation were exiled to Babylon. Some, though, were left behind, among them the prophet Jeremiah. When Governor Gedaliah was assassinated, this group fled to Egypt and took Jeremiah with them. (2 Kings 25:22-26; Jeremiah 43:5-7) There, they began sacrificing to false deities. Jeremiah remonstrated with the unfaithful Jews, but they were stubborn. They refused to turn to Jehovah and insisted that they would keep on making sacrificial smoke to the "queen of the heavens." Why? Because this is what they and their forefathers had done 'in the cities of Judah and in the streets of Jerusalem, when they used to be satisfied with bread and to be well off, and they did not see any calamity at all.' (Jeremiah 44:16, 17) The Jews also contended: "From the time that we ceased to make sacrificial smoke to the 'queen of the heavens' and pour out drink offerings to her we have lacked everything, and by the sword and by the famine we have come to our finish."—Jeremiah 44:18.

[16] How selective the memory can be! What were the facts? The Jews had indeed sacrificed to false gods in the land Jehovah had given them. Sometimes, as in the time of Ahaz, they suffered because of that apostasy. However, Jehovah was "slow to anger" with his covenant people. (Exodus 34:6; Psalm 86:15) He sent his prophets to

14. Why did Ahaz have no excuse when he turned to false gods?
15. In what way did the Jews in Egypt in Jeremiah's day sin?
16. Why were the Jews in Egypt utterly wrong in their reasoning?

urge them to repent. At times, when the king was faithful, Jehovah blessed him, and the people benefited from that blessing, even though most of them were unfaithful. (2 Chronicles 20:29-33; 27:1-6) How wrong those Jews in Egypt were to claim that any prosperity enjoyed back in their homeland had come from their false gods!

17 Before 607 B.C.E., Jehovah had urged the people of Judah: "Obey my voice, and I will become your God, and you yourselves will become my people; and you must walk in all the way that I shall command you, in order that it may go well with you." (Jeremiah 7:23) The Jews lost their temple and their land precisely because they refused to walk 'in all the way that Jehovah had commanded them.' Let us be sure to avoid that fatal error.

Jehovah Blesses Those Who Walk in His Way

18 Today, as in the past, walking in Jehovah's way demands loyalty—a determination to serve him alone. It demands trust—complete faith that Jehovah's promises are reliable and will come true. Walking in Jehovah's way demands obedience—following his laws without deviation and keeping his high standards. "Jehovah is righteous; he does love righteous acts."—Psalm 11:7.

19 Ahaz looked to the gods of Syria for security. The Israelites down in Egypt hoped that the "queen of the heavens," a goddess widely worshiped in the ancient Middle East, would bring them material prosperity. Today, many gods are not literal idols. Jesus warned against serving "Riches" rather than Jehovah. (Matthew 6:24) The apostle Paul spoke of "covetousness, which is idolatry." (Colossians 3:5) He also spoke of those whose "god is their belly." (Philippians 3:19) Yes, money and material things are among the main gods worshiped today. In reality, most—including many with religious affiliations—'rest their hope on uncertain riches.' (1 Timothy 6:17) Many work very hard serving these gods, and some reap rewards—living in the best homes, enjoying expensive things, and eating sumptuous meals. Not all enjoy such affluence, however. And even those who do eventually find these things unsatisfying in themselves. They are uncertain, temporary, and do not satisfy spiritual needs.—Matthew 5:3.

20 True, we have to be practical as we live through the last days of this system of things. We need to take reasonable steps to provide for our families in a material way. But if we place greater value on a high standard of living, the pursuit of money, or similar things than on serving God, we have fallen into a kind of idolatry and are no longer walking in Jehovah's way. (1 Timothy 6:9, 10) What, though, when we meet up with health, financial, or other problems? Let us not be like those Jews in Egypt who blamed their problems on serving God. Rather, let

17. Why did Judah lose its land and temple?
18. What must those who walk in Jehovah's way do?
19. Which gods do many worship today, and with what results?
20. What balance do we need to maintain?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ What qualities are vital if we are to walk in Jehovah's way?
- ☐ Why was the thinking of Ahaz false?
- ☐ What was wrong with the reasoning of the Jews in Egypt?
- ☐ How can we strengthen our determination to walk in Jehovah's way?

us put Jehovah to the test, which Ahaz failed to do. Loyally turn to Jehovah God for guidance. Trustfully apply his guidance, and pray for strength and wisdom to handle every situation. Then, confidently wait for Jehovah's blessing.

[21] Over the course of Israel's history, Jehovah richly blessed those who walked in his way. King David sang: "O Jehovah, lead me in your righteousness by reason of my foes." (Psalm 5:8) To him, Jehovah gave military victories over neighboring nations that later harassed Ahaz. Under Solomon, Israel was blessed with the peace and prosperity that the Jews in Egypt longed for later on. To Ahaz' son Hezekiah, Jehovah even gave victory over mighty Assyria. (Isaiah 59:1) Yes, Jehovah's hand was not short toward his loyal ones, who did not stand "in the way of sinners" but whose delight was in the law of God. (Psalm 1:1, 2) The same is still true. How, though, can we today be sure that we are walking in Jehovah's way? This will be discussed in the next article.

21. What blessings come to those who walk in Jehovah's way?

KEEP ON WALKING IN JEHOVAH'S WAY

"Hope in Jehovah and keep his way, and he will exalt you to take possession of the earth."—PSALM 37:34.

"MAKE known to me the way in which I should walk, for to you I have lifted up my soul." (Psalm 143:8) Christians today wholeheartedly echo those words of King David. They sincerely want to please Jehovah and walk in his way. What does this involve? For David, it meant keeping God's law. It involved trusting in Jehovah rather than in alliances with the nations. Yes, and it meant loyally serving Jehovah, not the gods of neighboring peoples. For Christians, walking in Jehovah's way involves more.

[2] For one thing, walking in Jehovah's way today means exercising faith in Jesus Christ's ransom sacrifice, acknowledging him as "the way and the truth and the life." (John 3:16; 14:6; Hebrews 5:9) It means, too, fulfilling "the law of the Christ," which includes showing love to one another, especially to Jesus' anointed brothers. (Galatians 6:2; Matthew 25:34-40) Those who walk in Jehovah's way love his principles and commands. (Psalm 119: 97; Proverbs 4:5, 6) They treasure their precious privilege of participating in the Christian ministry. (Colossians 4:17; 2 Timothy 4:5) Prayer is a regular part of their life. (Romans 12:12) And they 'keep strict watch that how they walk is not as unwise but as wise persons.' (Ephesians 5:15) They certainly do not sacrifice spiritual riches for temporary material advantages or illicit fleshly pleasures. (Matthew 6:19, 20; 1 John 2:15-17) Moreover,

1, 2. What did walking in Jehovah's way involve for King David, and what does it require of us today?

loyalty to Jehovah and trust in him are vital. (2 Corinthians 1:9; 10:5; Ephesians 4:24) Why? Because our situation is quite similar to that of ancient Israel.

The Need for Trust and Loyalty

[3] Israel was a small nation surrounded by unfriendly neighbors who engaged in licentious ceremonies in the worship of idol gods. (1 Chronicles 16:26) Only Israel served the one true and invisible God, Jehovah, and he required that they maintain high moral standards. (Deuteronomy 6:4) Similarly today, only a few million humans worship Jehovah, and they live in a world of almost six billion people whose standards and religious outlook are very different from theirs. If we are among those few million, we must be on guard against being influenced in a wrong way. How? Loyalty to Jehovah God, faith in him, and a firm trust that he will fulfill his promises will help. (Hebrews 11:6) This will keep us from putting our trust in the things the world hopes in.—Proverbs 20: 22; 1 Timothy 6:17.

[4] The apostle Paul showed how different Christians must be from the world when he wrote: "This, therefore, I say and bear witness to in the Lord, that you no longer go on walking just as the nations also walk in the unprofitableness of their minds, while they are in darkness mentally, and alienated from the life that belongs to God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the insensibility of their hearts." (Ephesians 4:17, 18) Jesus is "the true light." (John 1:9) Any who reject him or who claim to believe in him but do not obey "the law of the Christ" are "in darkness mentally." Far from walking in Jehovah's way, they are "alienated from the life that belongs to God." However wise they may think they are in a worldly way, they have 'ignorance in them' as to the only knowledge that leads to life, that of Jehovah God and Jesus Christ.—John 17:3; 1 Corinthians 3:19.

[5] Yet, the light of truth is shining in the world! (Psalm 43:3; Philippians 2:15) "True wisdom itself keeps crying aloud in the very street." (Proverbs 1:20) Last year Jehovah's Witnesses spent more than a billion hours telling their neighbors about Jehovah God and Jesus Christ. Hundreds of thousands responded. Should we, though, be surprised that many others failed to respond? No. Paul spoke of "the insensibility of their hearts." Some have unresponsive hearts because of selfishness or love of money. Others are influenced by false religion or the secular outlook that is so widespread today. Hard life experiences have led many to turn their backs on God. Others refuse to meet Jehovah's high moral standards. (John 3:20) Could the heart of one walking in Jehovah's way become insensitive in such respects?

[6] This did happen to ancient Israel, as Paul showed. He wrote: "These things became our examples, for us not to be persons desiring injurious things, even as they desired them. Neither become idolaters, as some of them did; just as it is written: 'The people sat down to eat and drink, and they got up to have a good time.' Neither let us practice fornication, as some of them committed fornication, only to fall, twenty-three thousand of them in one day."—1 Corinthians 10:6-8.

[7] Paul refers first to the occasion when Israel worshiped a golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai. (Exodus 32:5, 6) This was in direct disobedience to a divine command they

3. Why will loyalty, faith, and trust help to keep us walking in Jehovah's way?
4. Why are the nations "in darkness mentally"?
5. Although the light of truth is shining in the world, why are many hearts unresponsive?
6, 7. Though they were worshipers of Jehovah God, on what occasions did the Israelites fall away, and why?

had agreed to obey just a few weeks earlier. (Exodus 20:4-6; 24:3) Then, Paul refers to the time when Israel bowed down to Baal with the daughters of Moab. (Numbers 25: 1-9) Calf worship was characterized by gross self-indulgence, 'having a good time.'* Baal worship was accompanied by flagrant sexual immorality. (Revelation 2:14) Why did the Israelites commit these sins? Because they allowed their hearts to become 'desirous of injurious things'—whether the idolatry or the licentious practices that accompanied it.

8 Paul indicated that we should learn from these events. Learn what? It is unthinkable that a Christian would bow down to a golden calf or an ancient Moabite god. But what about immorality or unrestrained self-indulgence? These are common today, and if we allow a desire for them to grow in our hearts, they will come between us and Jehovah. The result will be the same as if we had committed idolatry—alienation from God. (Compare Colossians 3:5; Philippians 3: 19.) Indeed, Paul concludes his discussion of those events by exhorting fellow believers: "Flee from idolatry."—1 Corinthians 10:14.

Help in Walking in God's Way

9 If we are determined to keep walking in Jehovah's way, we are not left without help. Isaiah prophesied: "Your own ears will hear a word behind you saying: 'This is the way. Walk in it, you people,' in case you people should go to the right or in case you should go to the left." (Isaiah 30:21) How do 'our own ears' hear that 'word behind us'? Well, no one today hears a literal voice or receives a personal message from God. The "word" that is heard comes to all of us in the same way. First and foremost, it comes through the inspired Scriptures, the Bible, which contains the thoughts of God and a record of his dealings with humans. Since we are daily exposed to propaganda from sources "alienated from the life that belongs to God," for good spiritual health, we need to read the Bible and meditate on it regularly. This will help us to avoid "vain things" and to be "fully competent, completely equipped for every good work." (Acts 14:14, 15; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17) It will strengthen us, fortify us, and help us 'to make our way successful.' (Joshua 1:7, 8) Hence, Jehovah's Word urges: "Now, O sons, listen to me; yes, happy are the ones that keep my very ways. Listen to discipline and become wise, and do not show any neglect." —Proverbs 8:32, 33.

10 The 'word behind us' also comes by means of "the faithful and discreet slave," who supplies "food at the proper time." (Matthew 24:45-47) One way this food is supplied is in printed Bible-based publications, and in recent years this food supply has been abundant. For example, through the *Watchtower* magazine, our understanding of prophecy has been refined. In this journal, we have been encouraged to persevere in the work of preaching and disciple making despite growing apathy, we have been helped to avoid pitfalls, and we have been urged to develop fine Christian qualities. How we treasure such food at the proper time!

11 The faithful and discreet slave also supplies food through our regular meetings.

* Referring to the Greek word here translated "have a good time," one expositor says that it refers to the dances that occurred at pagan festivals and adds: "Many of these dances, as is well known, were directly designed to provoke the most licentious passions."

8. What can we learn from Israel's experiences?
9. (a) What help do we receive to keep us walking in Jehovah's way? (b) What is one way that we hear the 'word behind us'?
10. What is a second way that we hear the 'word behind us'?
11. Explain a third way that we can hear the 'word behind us.'

An important resolution was adopted at the "God's Way of Life" District and International Conventions

These include local congregation meetings, semiannual meetings at a circuit level, and larger annual conventions. What faithful Christian does not value such gatherings? They are a vital help to support us in walking in Jehovah's way. Since many have to spend a lot of time at work or in school in company with those who do not share their faith, regular Christian association is literally lifesaving. Meetings give us a fine opportunity 'to incite one another to love and fine works.' (Hebrews 10:24) We love our brothers, and we love associating with them. —Psalm 133:1.

[12] Strengthened by such spiritual food, almost six million people today are walking

in Jehovah's way, and millions of others are studying the Bible to learn how to do so. Are they discouraged or weakened by the fact that they are few in number compared with the billions of the earth's population? In no way! They are determined to keep on heeding the 'word behind them,' loyally do-

12. What determination do Jehovah's Witnesses have, and how did they recently express it?

ing Jehovah's will. As a public manifestation of this determination, during the 1998/99 "God's Way of Life" District and International Conventions, the delegates adopted a resolution expressing their heartfelt stand. Following is the text of that resolution.

Resolution

13 "We, as Jehovah's Witnesses assembled at the 'God's Way of Life' Convention, wholeheartedly agree that God's way is the best way of life. We recognize, however, that the majority of mankind today feel differently. Human society has experimented with numerous concepts, philosophies, and religious ideas on what constitutes the best way of life. An honest look at human history and world conditions today bears out the truthfulness of the divine pronouncement recorded at Jeremiah 10:23: 'It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step.'

14 "Every day we see more evidence confirming the truthfulness of those words. For the most part, human society disregards God's way of life. People pursue what seems right in their own eyes. The results have been tragic—the breakdown of family life, leaving children without guidance; the wholesale pursuit of materialism, ending in emptiness and frustration; the senseless crime and violence, claiming countless victims; the ethnic strife and wars, taking a ghastly toll in human lives; the rampant immorality, fueling an epidemic of sexually transmitted diseases. These are but a few of the multitude of complex problems that interfere with the pursuit of happiness, peace, and security.

15 "In view of humankind's sad plight and the nearness of the 'war of the great day of God Almighty,' called Armageddon (Revelation 16:14, 16), we as Jehovah's Witnesses resolve that:

16 "First: We view ourselves as belonging to Jehovah God, having individually dedicated ourselves to him unconditionally, and we shall maintain unshakable faith in Jehovah's provision of the ransom through his Son, Jesus Christ. We are determined to walk in God's way of life, serving as his Witnesses and submitting to his sovereignty as expressed through the rulership of Jesus Christ.

17 "Second: We will continue to adhere to the high moral and spiritual standards of the Bible. We are determined to refrain from walking as the nations walk in the unprofitableness of their minds. (Ephesians 4:17-19) It is our resolve to remain clean before Jehovah and without spot from this world. —James 1:27.

18 "Third: We will hold fast to our Scriptural position as a worldwide Christian brotherhood. We will maintain Christian neutrality among the nations, not allowing ourselves to be caught up in racial, national, or ethnic hatred or divisiveness.

19 "Fourth: We who are parents will inculcate God's way in our children. We will set an example in Christian living, which includes regular Bible reading, family study, and a whole-souled share in the Christian congregation and in the field ministry.

20 "Fifth: All of us will strive to cultivate the godly qualities that our Creator exemplifies, and we will endeavor to imitate his personality and his ways, as Jesus did. (Ephesians 5:1) We are resolved to let all our

13, 14. What realistic view of the world situation do Jehovah's Witnesses have?

15, 16. Regarding God's way of life, what determination was expressed in the resolution?

17, 18. What position will Jehovah's Witnesses continue to maintain as regards moral standards and the Christian brotherhood?

19, 20. (a) What will Christian parents do? (b) How will all true Christians continue to identify themselves as Christ's disciples?

affairs take place with love, thereby identifying ourselves as Christ's disciples.—John 13:35.

[21] "Sixth: Without letup we will continue preaching the good news of God's Kingdom, making disciples, and we will instruct them in God's way of life and encourage them to receive further training at congregation meetings.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20; Hebrews 10:24, 25.

[22] "Seventh: As individuals and as a religious organization, we will continue to put God's will first in our lives. Using his Word, the Bible, as our guide, we will not deviate to the right or to the left, thus confirming that God's way is far superior to the ways of the world. We are determined to pursue God's way of life—firmly and loyally, now and forever!

[23] "We make this resolution because we put full confidence in Jehovah's loving promise that he who does the will of God remains forever. We make this resolution because we are convinced that living by Scriptural principles, counsel, and admonition makes for the best way of life today and lays a fine foundation for the future, so that we may get a firm hold on the real life. (1 Timothy 6:19; 2 Timothy 4: 7b, 8) Above all, we make this resolution because we love Jehovah God with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength!

21-23. What will Jehovah's Witnesses continue to do, and of what are they convinced?

Do You Recall?

- ☐ What is required for a Christian to walk in Jehovah's way?
- ☐ Why do we need to cultivate trust in Jehovah and loyalty to him?
- ☐ What help is available as we walk in Jehovah's way?
- ☐ Give some highlights of the resolution adopted at the "God's Way of Life" Conventions.

[24] "All in attendance at this convention who favor the adoption of this resolution, please say AYE!"

[25] Hundreds of arenas and stadiums around the world reverberated as all in attendance answered with a thunderous "AYE!" Jehovah's Witnesses have no doubt that they will continue to walk in Jehovah's way. They have full trust in Jehovah and faith that he will fulfill his promises. They remain loyal to him, no matter what occurs. And they are determined to do his will.

"God Is for Us"

[26] Jehovah's Witnesses remember the psalmist's exhortation: "Hope in Jehovah and keep his way, and he will exalt you to take possession of the earth." (Psalm 37: 34) They do not forget Paul's encouraging words: "If God is for us, who will be against us? He who did not even spare his own Son but delivered him up for us all, why will he not also with him kindly give us all other things?" (Romans 8:31, 32) Yes, if we keep walking in Jehovah's way, he will furnish us "all things richly for our enjoyment." (1 Timothy 6:17) What better place can there be than where we are—walking in Jehovah's way, alongside our dear brothers and sisters. With Jehovah at our side, let us be determined to stay there and to endure to the end, fully confident that in his due time, we will see him fulfill every last one of his promises.—Titus 1:2.

24, 25. What was the response to the proposed resolution, and what is the determination of those who walk in Jehovah's way?
26. What is the happy situation of those who walk in Jehovah's way?

"Bless Jehovah, O My Soul"

"IN RECENT months my ministry has become dull and joyless," says Nancy.* For some ten years, she has served as a pioneer, a full-time proclaimer of the good news. Yet, she adds: "I do not like what is happening to me. I seem to present the Kingdom message more in a matter-of-fact way and less from the heart. What should I do?"

Consider, too, the case of Keith, an elder in a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. How surprised he was to hear his wife say: "You must have something on your mind. In the prayer you just offered, you gave thanks for the food, even though this is not mealtime!" Keith admits: "I can see that my prayers have become mechanical."

Undoubtedly, you do not want your expressions of praise to Jehovah God to be cold and perfunctory. On the contrary, you want them to be heartfelt, stemming from feelings of gratitude. However, a feeling cannot be put on or taken off like a garment. It must spring from within a person. How can one feel grateful at heart? The 103rd Psalm provides us with insight in this regard.

King David of ancient Israel composed the 103rd Psalm. He opens with the words: "Bless Jehovah, O my soul, even everything within me, his holy name." (Psalm 103:1) "The word *bless,* as applied to God," says one reference work, "means to praise, implying always a strong affection for him as well as a sense of gratitude." Desiring to praise Jehovah with a heart full of love and appreciation, David exhorts his own soul—himself—to "bless Jehovah." But what generates this warm feeling in David's heart toward the God he worships?

David continues: "Do not forget all his [Jehovah's] doings." (Psalm 103:2) Feeling grateful to Jehovah is evidently connected with meditating appreciatively on "his doings." Exactly what doings of Jehovah does David have in mind? Looking at Jehovah God's creation, such as a star-studded sky on a clear night, can indeed fill the heart with gratitude for the Creator. The starry heavens touched David deeply. (Psalm 8:3, 4; 19:1) In the 103rd Psalm, though, David remembers Jehovah's activity of another sort.

Jehovah "Is Forgiving All Your Error"

In this psalm, David recounts God's acts of loving-kindness. Referring to the first and foremost among these, he sings: 'Jehovah is forgiving all your error.' (Psalm 103:3) David was certainly aware of his own sinful state. After Nathan the prophet confronted him about his adulterous relationship with Bath-sheba, David admitted: "Against you [Jehovah], you alone, I have sinned, and what is bad in your eyes I have done." (Psalm 51:4) With a broken heart, he made the entreaty: "Show me favor, O God, according to your loving-kindness. According to the abundance of your mercies wipe out my transgressions. Thoroughly wash me from my error, and cleanse me even from my sin." (Psalm 51:1, 2) How grateful David must have felt to be forgiven! Being an imperfect human, he committed other sins in his life, but he never failed to repent,

* Some of the names have been changed.

accept reproof, and correct his ways. Reflection on God's marvelous acts of kindness toward him moved David to bless Jehovah.

Are we not also sinful? (Romans 5:12) Even the apostle Paul lamented: "I really delight in the law of God according to the man I am within, but I behold in my members another law warring against the law of my mind and leading me captive to sin's law that is in my members. Miserable man that I am! Who will rescue me from the body undergoing this death?" (Romans 7:22-24) How grateful we can be that Jehovah does not keep account of our transgressions! He gladly erases them when we repent and seek forgiveness.

David reminds himself: "[Jehovah] is healing all your maladies." (Psalm 103:3) Since healing is an act of restoration, it entails more than forgiveness of wrongdoing. It involves the removal of "maladies"—the bad consequences of the error of our ways. In the new world of his making, Jehovah will indeed eradicate the physical consequences of sin, such as sickness and death. (Isaiah 25:8; Revelation 21:1-4) Even today, however, God is healing us of spiritual maladies. For some, these include a bad conscience and a severed relationship with him. "Do not forget" what Jehovah has already done for each of us personally in this regard.

He "Is Reclaiming Your Life"

"[Jehovah] is reclaiming your life from the very pit," sings David. (Psalm 103:4) "The very pit" is the common grave of mankind—Sheol, or Hades. Even before becoming a king over Israel, David found himself in the jaws of death. For example, Israel's King Saul nurtured a murderous hatred toward David and attempted to kill him on various occasions. (1 Samuel 18:9-29; 19:10; 23:6-29) The Philistines also wanted David dead. (1 Samuel 21:10-15) But every time, Jehovah rescued him from "the very pit." How grateful David must have felt when remembering these doings of Jehovah!

What about you? Has Jehovah sustained you through periods of depression or times of loss? Or have you come to know of instances when he has reclaimed the lives of his faithful Witnesses from the pit of Sheol in our times? Perhaps you have been touched by reading accounts of his acts of deliverance in the pages of this magazine. Why not take time to reflect appreciatively on these doings of the true God? And, of course, all of us have reason to be grateful to Jehovah for the resurrection hope.—John 5:28, 29; Acts 24:15.

Jehovah gives us both life and that which makes it enjoyable and worth living. The psalmist declares that God "is crowning you with loving-kindness and mercies." (Psalm 103:4) In our hour of need, Jehovah does not abandon us but comes to our aid through his visible organization and the appointed elders, or shepherds, in the congregation. Such help enables us to deal with a trying situation without losing our self-respect and dignity. Christian shepherds care very much for the sheep. They encourage the sick and depressed and do all they can to restore those who have fallen. (Isaiah 32:1, 2; 1 Peter 5:2, 3; Jude 22, 23) Jehovah's spirit motivates these shepherds to be compassionate and loving toward the flock. His "loving-kindness and mercies" are indeed like a crown that adorns us and gives us dignity! Never forgetting his doings, let us bless Jehovah and his holy name.

Continuing on with his self-admonition, the psalmist David sings: "[Jehovah] is satisfying your lifetime with what is good; your youth keeps renewing itself just like that of an eagle." (Psalm 103:5) The life Jehovah gives is one of satisfaction and joy. Why, the very knowledge of the truth it-

David meditated on Jehovah's acts of loving-kindness. Do you?

self is a treasure beyond compare and a source of tremendous joy! And consider how deeply satisfying is the work Jehovah has given us, that of preaching and making disciples. What a delight it is to find someone interested in learning about the true God and to help that one come to know Jehovah and bless him! Yet, whether anyone in our locality listens or not, it is a grand privilege to have a share in a work connected with the sanctification of Jehovah's name and the vindication of his sovereignty.

While persisting in the work of proclaiming God's Kingdom, who does not become tired or grow weary? But Jehovah keeps renewing the strength of his servants, making them 'like eagles' that have powerful wings and soar to great heights in the sky. How grateful we can be that our loving heavenly Father provides such "dynamic energy" so that we can faithfully carry out our ministry day after day!—Isaiah 40:29-31.

To illustrate: Clara holds a full-time secular job and also spends about 50 hours every month in the field ministry. She says: "Sometimes I am tired, and I force myself to go out in the field service only because I have made an arrangement to work with someone. But once I am out, I always feel invigorated." You too may have experienced the vigor that results from divine support in the Christian ministry. May you be moved to say, as did David in the opening words of this psalm: "Bless Jehovah, O my soul, even everything within me, his holy name."

Jehovah Delivers His People

The psalmist also sings: "Jehovah is executing acts of righteousness and judicial decisions for all those being defrauded. He made known his ways to Moses, his dealings even to the sons of Israel." (Psalm 103:6, 7) Likely, David is thinking of the 'defrauding' of the Israelites under Egyptian oppressors in the days of Moses. Meditating on how Jehovah made known his ways of deliverance to Moses must have generated a feeling of gratitude in David's heart.

We can be moved to similar gratitude by reflecting on God's dealings with the Israelites. But we should not fail to ponder over the experiences of Jehovah's modern-day

servants, such as those mentioned in chapters 29 and 30 of the book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom.* The accounts documented in it and in other publications of the Watch Tower Society enable us to see how Jehovah has helped his people in modern times to endure imprisonment, mob action, bans, concentration camps, and slave-labor camps. There have been trials in war-torn lands, such as Burundi, Liberia, Rwanda, and the former Yugoslavia. Whenever persecution has occurred, Jehovah's hand has always sustained his faithful servants. Contemplating these doings of our great God, Jehovah, can do for us what pondering over the account of deliverance from Egypt did for David.

Consider also how tenderly Jehovah delivers us from the burden of sin. He has provided "the blood of the Christ" to "cleanse our consciences from dead works." (Hebrews 9:14) When we repent of our sins and seek forgiveness on the basis of Christ's shed blood, God puts our transgressions far off from us—"as far off as the sunrise is from the sunset"—and restores us to his favor. And think of Jehovah's provisions in the way of Christian meetings, upbuilding association, shepherds in the congregation, and Bible-based publications we receive through "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45) Do not all these doings of Jehovah help us strengthen our relationship with him? David proclaims: "Jehovah is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness. . . . He has not done to us even according to our sins; nor according to our errors has he brought upon us what we deserve." (Psalm 103:8-14) Meditating on Jehovah's loving care can certainly move us to glorify him and magnify his holy name.

"Bless Jehovah, All You His Works"

In comparison with the immortality of Jehovah, the "God of eternity," the "days" of "mortal man" are brief indeed—"like those of green grass." But David appreciatively reflects: "The loving-kindness of Jehovah is from time indefinite even to time indefinite toward those fearing him, and his righteousness to the sons of sons, toward those keeping his covenant and toward those remembering his orders so as to carry them out." (Genesis 21:33, footnote; Psalm 103:15-18) Jehovah does not forget those who fear him. In due time, he will give them everlasting life.—John 3:16; 17:3.

Expressing his appreciation for Jehovah's kingship, David says: "Jehovah himself has firmly established his throne in the very heavens; and over everything his own kingship has held domination." (Psalm 103:19) Although Jehovah's kingship was visibly expressed for a time through the kingdom of Israel, his throne is actually in heaven. By reason of his Creatorship, Jehovah is the Sovereign Ruler of the universe and exercises his divine will in heaven and on earth according to his own purposes.

David even exhorts the heavenly angelic creatures. He sings: "Bless Jehovah, O you angels of his, mighty in power, carrying out his word, by listening to the voice of his word. Bless Jehovah, all you armies of his, you ministers of his, doing his will. Bless Jehovah, all you his works, in all places of his domination. Bless Jehovah, O my soul." (Psalm 103:20-22) Should not our reflection on Jehovah's acts of loving-kindness toward us move us also to bless him? By all means! And we can be sure that the sound of our voice in personal praise to God will not be lost among the mighty chorus of praisers that includes even the righteous angels. May we wholeheartedly praise our heavenly Father, always speaking well of him. Indeed, let us take to heart David's words, "Bless Jehovah, O my soul."

THE CHRISTIAN CONGREGATION
A Source of Strengthening Aid

POPI, a woman in her early 20's, was frustrated because of a painful family situation involving lack of open communication with her parents.* After pouring her heart out to a Christian elder and his wife, she wrote to them: "Thank you so much for taking the time to talk to me. You do not know how much it means to me that you care. I thank Jehovah for giving me people I can trust and talk to."

Toula, a recently widowed woman with two teenage children, found herself in a quagmire of troubling emotional and financial difficulties. She and her children regularly received the strengthening visits of a Christian married couple from the congregation. After she successfully coped with her situation, she sent them a card, saying: "I always remember you in my prayers. I recall the numerous times you stood by me and supported me."

Do you sometimes feel that you are "loaded down" by the increasing pressures of this world? (Matthew 11:28) Have "time and unforeseen occurrence" marred your life with painful experiences? (Ecclesiastes 9:11) Then you are not alone. But as thousands of distressed ones have already found, you too can find meaningful help in the Christian congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses. In the first century C.E., the apostle Paul found that certain fellow believers were an especially "strengthening aid" to him. (Colossians 4:10, 11) You can have a similar experience.

Support and Assistance

In the Christian Greek Scriptures, the word "congregation" is translated from the Greek term *ek·kle·si'a,* which means a group of people called together. Inherent in that word are the ideas of solidarity and mutual support.

The Christian congregation upholds the truth of God's Word and declares the good news of his Kingdom. (1 Timothy 3:15; 1 Peter 2:9) However, the congregation also provides spiritual support and assistance for those associated with it. Therein, one can find a group of loving, concerned, and caring friends, who are ready and willing to help and comfort others in times of stress.—2 Corinthians 7:5-7.

Worshipers of Jehovah have always found safety and security in his congregation. The psalmist indicated that he experienced joy and a feeling of security among God's congregated people. (Psalm 27:4, 5; 55:14; 122:1) Similarly today, the Christian congregation is an association of fellow believers who build up and encourage one another. —Proverbs 13:20; Romans 1:11, 12.

Members of the congregation are taught to "work what is good toward all, but especially toward those related to [them] in the faith." (Galatians 6:10) The Bible-based education they receive moves them to manifest brotherly love and tender affection for one another. (Romans 12:10; 1 Peter 3:8) Spiritual brothers and sisters in the congregation are moved to be kind, peaceable, and tenderly compassionate. (Ephesians 4:3) Instead of being just formal worshipers, they show loving concern for others.—James 1:27.

In the congregation, therefore, crushed ones find the warm atmosphere of a familylike environment. (Mark 10:29, 30) The

* Names have been changed.

We can provide strengthening aid for the sick, the bereaved, and others

feeling of belonging to a close-knit and loving group strengthens them. (Psalm 133:1-3) Through the congregation, "the faithful and discreet slave" provides nourishing spiritual "food at the proper time."—Matthew 24:45.

Help From Loving Overseers

Members of the Christian congregation can expect to find in it loving, understanding, and qualified shepherds who provide spiritual support and encouragement. Shepherds with such qualities are like "a hiding place from the wind and a place of concealment from the rainstorm." (Isaiah 32:1, 2) Spirit-appointed elders, or overseers, care for God's sheeplike people, encourage the sick and depressed, and seek to restore those who have erred. —Psalm 100:3; 1 Peter 5:2, 3.

Of course, the congregation's body of elders is not a staff of professional therapists or health practitioners, able to cure physical or mental health problems faced by fellow believers. In this system of things, the ailing still "need a physician." (Luke 5:31) Nevertheless, such shepherds can help those who are in need spiritually. (James 5:14, 15) Whenever possible, the elders also arrange for other assistance.—James 2:15, 16.

Who is behind such a loving arrangement? Jehovah God himself! The prophet Ezekiel

portrays Jehovah as declaring: "I will search for my sheep and care for them. . . . I will deliver them out of all the places to which they have been scattered . . . I myself shall feed my sheep, and I myself shall make them lie down." God is also concerned about the feeble and weak sheep.—Ezekiel 34:11, 12, 15, 16.

True Help at the Right Time

Is real help actually available in the Christian congregation? Yes, and the following examples illustrate the variety of circumstances in which the congregation proves to be of assistance.

♦ *Loss of a loved one.* Anna's husband died after a chronic illness. "Since then, I have been the recipient of warm love from the Christian brotherhood," she says. "The continuing kind words of support and encouragement from my fellow believers, including their heartfelt hugs, have kept my heart beating instead of breaking entirely, and I thank Jehovah. Their love has made me feel greatly supported, ultimately uplifted, tenderly cared for." You too may have had the traumatic experience of losing a loved one in death. At such times, members of the congregation can provide much-needed comfort and emotional support.

♦ *Sickness.* Arthur, a traveling overseer from Poland, regularly visited congregations in Central Asia in order to strengthen them spiritually. During one of these visits, he became quite ill and his recuperation met with serious complications. "I want to tell you how the brothers and sisters in [a city in Kazakhstan] cared for me," recalls Arthur with deep appreciation. "Brothers and sisters, many of whom I do not know—and even interested ones—brought money, food items, and medicine. . . . And they did it with great joy.

"Imagine my feelings when I received an envelope with some money and the following letter: 'Dear Brother, I am sending you warm greetings. Mommy gave me money for ice cream, but I decided to give it to you for medicine. Please get better soon. Jehovah needs us for a long time. Best wishes. And tell us some more good, instructive stories. Vova.'" Yes, as shown in this case, young and old in the congregation can provide strengthening aid in times of sickness. —Philippians 2:25-29.

♦ *Depression.* Teri had the heartfelt desire to serve as a pioneer, or full-time Kingdom proclaimer. Because of difficulties, though, she had to stop pioneering. "I felt tremendous guilt for trying to serve in this capacity and not even lasting a full year," she says. Teri wrongly believed that Jehovah's approval depended only on the amount of her service to him. (Contrast Mark 12: 41-44.) Quite depressed, she isolated herself. But then refreshing help came from the congregation.

Teri recalls: "An older pioneer sister readily came to my assistance and listened to me as I poured out my feelings. When I left her home, I felt as if a weight had been lifted off me. From that point on, this pioneer sister and her husband, an elder in the congregation, provided valuable help. I received daily calls from them asking how I was doing. . . . They have allowed me to sit in on their family study at times, which has impressed upon me the importance of families remaining close together."

It is not uncommon for many—even dedicated Christians—to become depressed, discouraged, and lonely. How grateful we can be that loving, unselfish assistance is available in God's congregation!—1 Thessalonians 5:14.

♦ *Disasters and accidents.* Put yourself in the shoes of a family of four who lost all their possessions when their house burned down. Soon they had what they called "an encouraging experience that will forever

touch us and that impressed us with the true love among Jehovah's people." They explain: "Almost immediately we were overwhelmed with sincere calls of support and sympathy from our spiritual brothers and sisters. The phone rang constantly. Everyone's genuine concern and love were so moving that we shed tears of gratitude."

Before long, a large group of brothers was organized by the elders of the congregation, and in a few days, they built a new house for this family. A neighbor exclaimed: "You should see it! There are all kinds of people working there—men, women, blacks, Hispanics!" This was clear evidence of brotherly love.—John 13:35.

Fellow Christians also gave the family clothing, food, and money. The father comments: "This was during the Christmas season when everyone is giving gifts, but we can honestly say that no one else enjoyed the kind of genuine, overwhelming generosity that we did." And they add: "Memories of the fire are slowly fading and are being replaced with cherished memories of kind acts and good friends. Our thanks go to our loving heavenly Father, Jehovah, that we have such a marvelous, united family of brothers on earth, and we are so grateful to be part of it!"

Of course, such intervention is not possible, nor is it expected, in every such tragedy. But this instance certainly illustrates the support that the congregation may provide.

Wisdom From Above

Many have found another source of help and strength in the Christian congregation. What is that? Publications that are prepared by "the faithful and discreet slave." Prominent among these are the journals *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* In order to provide insightful counsel and practical instruction, these publications rely principally on the divine wisdom found in the Bible. (Psalm 119:105) Scriptural information is supplemented by responsible and authoritative research on such subjects as mental depression, recovery from abuse, various social and economic problems, challenges faced by young people, and difficulties peculiar to developing lands. Above all, these publications uphold God's way as the best way of life.—Isaiah 30:20, 21.

Each year, the Watch Tower Society receives thousands of letters of appreciation. Concerning an *Awake!* article on suicide, for instance, a young man in Russia wrote: "Because of my inclination toward depression, . . . I have many times considered suicide. This article strengthened my belief that God will help me handle my problems. He wants me to live. I thank him for his support given by means of this article."

If the stormy waves of trouble in this world seem too violent to negotiate, you can be sure that there is a safe haven in the Christian congregation. Indeed, if the arid desert of this loveless system is sapping your strength, you can find a reinvigorating oasis in Jehovah's organization. After experiencing such support, you too may echo the sentiments of a Christian woman who successfully dealt with her husband's grave illness and wrote: "Because of the love and care shown to us, I feel as though Jehovah carried us through this crisis in the palm of his hand. How thankful I am to be part of Jehovah's magnificent organization!"

In Our Next Issue

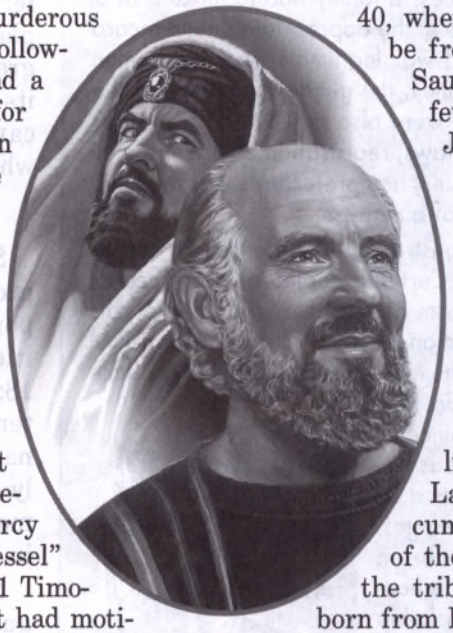
Time and Eternity
—What Do They Mean?

"Gifts in Men"
to Care for Jehovah's Sheep

Paul's Fellow Workers
—Who Were They?

SAUL
A Chosen Vessel to the Lord

SAUL of Tarsus was a murderous opponent of Christ's followers. But the Lord had a different future in store for him. Saul was to become an outstanding representative of the very cause he had fought so vehemently. Said Jesus: "This man [Saul] is a chosen vessel to me to bear my name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel." —Acts 9:15.



Saul's life as "an insolent man" was changed completely when he was shown mercy and became the "chosen vessel" of the Lord Jesus Christ. (1 Timothy 1:12, 13) Energies that had motivated participation in the stoning of Stephen and other attacks on Jesus' disciples were turned to entirely different objectives when Saul became the Christian apostle Paul. Jesus evidently saw desirable traits in Saul. What traits? Who was Saul? How did his background make him suitable for use in advancing true worship? Can we learn anything from his experience?

Saul's Family Background

At the time of Stephen's murder soon after Pentecost 33 C.E., Saul was "a young man." When writing to Philemon in about 60-61 C.E., he was "an aged man." (Acts 7: 58; Philemon 9) Scholars suggest that, according to the ancient reckoning of ages, "young" likely meant an age between 24 and 40, whereas "an aged man" would be from 50 to 56 years old. So Saul was probably born just a few years after the birth of Jesus.

Jews then lived in many parts of the world. Conquest, slavery, deportation, trade, and voluntary migration were among the causes of their dispersion from Judea. Though his family were Jews of the dispersion, Saul underlines their allegiance to the Law, stating that he was "circumcised the eighth day, out of the family stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born from Hebrews; as respects law, a Pharisee." Saul bore the same Hebrew name as an eminent member of his tribe—the first king of Israel. As a Roman from birth, Saul of Tarsus also had a Latin name, Paullus. —Philippians 3:5; Acts 13:21; 22:25-29.

Saul's being born a Roman meant that one of his male ancestors had acquired the privilege of citizenship. How? There are several possibilities. Apart from inheriting citizenship, it could be accorded to individuals or groups either for particular merits, for mere political expediency, or as a reward for some signal service to the State. A slave able to buy his freedom from a Roman, or one emancipated by a Roman citizen, would become a Roman himself. So would a veteran of the auxiliary forces upon being discharged from the Roman legions.

Registration and Certification of Roman Citizenship

Registration of legitimate children of Roman citizens was established by Augustus with two statutes that were enacted in 4 and in 9 C.E. Registration had to take place within 30 days of birth. In the provinces, a family had to make a declaration before a magistrate in the appropriate public-record office, stating that the child was legitimate and had Roman citizenship. The parents' names, the gender and name of the child, and the date of birth were also registered. Even prior to the introduction of these laws, registration of citizens in all Roman municipalities, colonies, and prefectures was renewed every five years by means of a census.

Status could thus be demonstrated by reference to a corpus of properly kept archives. Certified copies of such records could be obtained in the form of portable wooden diptychs (folding tablets). In the opinion of some scholars, when Paul claimed Roman citizenship, he may have been able to produce a certificate for corroboration. (Acts 16:37; 22:25-29; 25:11) Since Roman citizenship was viewed as having almost "sacred quality" and entitled a person to many privileges, forgery of such documents was an extremely serious offense. Falsification of one's status was punishable by death.

Historic Costume in Pictures/Dover Publications, Inc., New York

Local natives dwelling in Roman colonies could in time become citizens. It is also said that in certain periods citizenship was purchased for large sums. How citizenship entered Saul's family remains a mystery.

We do know that Saul came from Tarsus, the principal city and capital of the Roman province of Cilicia (now in southern Turkey). Though a sizable Jewish community lived in the area, life there would also have exposed Saul to Gentile culture. Tarsus was a large and prosperous city noted as a center of Hellenistic, or Grecian, learning. Estimates put its first-century population at between 300,000 and 500,000. It was a trading center on the main highway between Asia Minor, Syria, and Mesopotamia. Tarsus owed its prosperity to commerce and to the fertility of the surrounding plain, which produced mainly grain, wine, and linen. From its thriving textile industry came goat-hair cloth from which tents were made.

Saul's Education

Saul, or Paul, made honest provision for himself and supported his missionary activities by making tents. (Acts 18:2, 3; 20:34) The trade of tentmaker was typical of his native city, Tarsus. It is likely that Saul learned the tentmaking trade from his father in youth.

Saul's knowledge of languages—especially his mastery of Greek, the common tongue of the Roman Empire—also proved invaluable in his missionary work. (Acts 21:37–22:2) Analysts of his writings say that his Greek is excellent. His vocabulary is not classical or literary but, rather, reflects that of the *Septuagint,* the Greek translation of the Hebrew Scriptures that he often quoted or paraphrased. On this evidence, various scholars assume that Saul received at least a good elementary education in Greek, probably in a Jewish school. "In antiquity a better education—above all a Greek education—was not to be had for nothing; as a rule, it presupposed some material support," says scholar Martin Heng-

el. Saul's education thus suggests that he came from a prominent family.

Likely, when he was no older than 13, Saul continued his schooling in Jerusalem, some 520 miles from home. He was educated at the feet of Gamaliel, a well-known and highly esteemed teacher of the Pharisaic tradition. (Acts 22:3; 23:6) Those studies, comparable to a university education today, threw open the door of opportunity for achieving prominence in Judaism.*

Abilities Put to Good Use

Born into a Jewish family in a Hellenistic and Roman city, Saul belonged to three worlds. A cosmopolitan multilingual background doubtless helped him to become "all things to people of all sorts." (1 Corinthians 9:19-23) His Roman citizenship later permitted him to defend his ministry legally and take the good news before the highest authority in the Roman Empire. (Acts 16:37-40; 25:11, 12) Of course, Saul's background, education, and personality were known to the resurrected Jesus, who said to Ananias: "Be on your way, because this man is a chosen vessel to me to bear my name to the nations as well as to kings and the sons of Israel. For I shall show him plainly how many things he must suffer for my name." (Acts 9:13-16) When channeled in the right direction, Saul's zeal was instrumental in spreading the Kingdom message to distant territories.

Jesus' choice of Saul for a special commission was a unique event in Christian history. Yet, all present-day Christians have individual abilities and characteristics that can be used effectively in spreading the good news. When Saul understood what Jesus wanted of him, he did not hold back. He did all he could to promote Kingdom interests. Is that true of you?

* Concerning the content and nature of the education Saul would have received from Gamaliel, see *The Watchtower,* July 15, 1996, pages 26-9.

Saul's Roman Name

Every male Roman citizen had at least three elements to his name. He had a first name, a family name (connected with his tribe, or *gens*), and a surname. One famous example is Gaius Julius Caesar. The Bible gives no full Roman names, but secular sources tell us that Agrippa was Marcus Julius Agrippa. Gallio was Lucius Junius Gallio. (Acts 18:12; 25:13) Scriptural examples of the last two of a person's three names are Pontius Pilatus (inscription below), Sergius Paulus, Claudius Lysias, and Porcius Festus.—Acts 4:27; 13:7; 23:26; 24:27.

It is not possible to establish with certainty whether Paullus was Saul's first name or his surname. It was not unusual to add informally another name by which a person might be called by his family and acquaintances. Alternatively, a non-Roman name like Saul could be used as a substitute. "[Saul] would never do as a Roman name," says one scholar, "but as a native name given as a *signum* to a Roman citizen it will do very well indeed." In multilingual areas, the situation may have determined which of his names a man might choose to use.

Photograph by Israel Museum, ©Israel Antiquities Authority

Violence—Soon to End Forever!

"Violence Imperils Nation"—*The New York Times*, United States.

"Violence at Home"—*O Globo*, Brazil.

"Violence Stalks World's Women"—*The Globe and Mail*, Canada.

THESE headlines from newspapers in North and South America illustrate a disturbing worldwide trend. As the World Health Organization put it recently, "violence in all its forms has increased dramatically in recent decades."

Consider some sobering statistics:

Homicides. In Latin America and the Caribbean, some 1,250 people meet a violent death each day. As a consequence, "in half of the countries of the region, murder is the second leading cause of death in young people aged 15-24."

Violence against children. Physical, sexual, and emotional abuse of children are problems throughout the world. For instance, "surveys of adults in several industrialized countries suggest that 10%–15% of children are victims of sexual abuse—most of them girls."

Violence against women. After investigating human rights abuses committed worldwide in 1997, researchers concluded that "domestic violence has been one of the principal causes of female injury in almost every country in the world." (*Human Rights Watch World Report 1998*) Domestic violence, being a widespread yet underreported problem, is now called "the silent crisis of the 20th century."—*The Globe and Mail*, Canada.

The earth was similarly "filled with violence" in the days of Noah. (Genesis 6:9-12) But Jehovah God kept that "preacher of righteousness" and his family alive "when he brought a deluge upon a world of ungodly people." God will take comparable action in our day. He will preserve "people of godly devotion" when he removes the violent and wicked and makes this earth a paradise in his promised new world. (2 Peter 2:4-9; 3:11-13) Are you not thrilled to know that violence will soon end forever?