

THE WATCHTOWER
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

IS IT REALLY A MARKED YEAR?

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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A MARKED YEAR?

IS THERE anything special about the year 2000? People living in Western lands generally view it as the first year of the third millennium. Elaborate preparations to celebrate it are under way. Huge electronic clocks are being installed to count off the seconds until the new millennium dawns. Gala New Year's Eve balls are being organized. T-shirts bearing end-of-millennium slogans are being hawked at country stores as well as in big-city shopping malls.

Churches, large and small, will be joining in the year-long festivities. Early next year, Pope John Paul II is expected to travel to Israel to lead Roman Catholics in what has been called "the Roman Catholic Church's jubilee celebration of the millen-

nium." It is estimated that between two and a half million and six million tourists, from the devout to the curious, are planning to visit Israel next year.

Why are so many people planning to visit Israel? Speaking for the pope, Roger Cardinal Etchegaray, a Vatican official, said: "The year 2000 is a celebration of Christ and his life in this land. Therefore it is only natural that the Pope would come here." How is the year 2000 connected with Christ? The year 2000 is commonly thought to mark exactly 2,000 years from the birth of Christ. But does it? We shall see.

The year 2000 is even more significant to members of some religious groups. They are convinced that within the next year or so, Jesus will return to the Mount of Olives

and the battle of Armageddon, spoken of in the book of Revelation, will be fought in the valley of Megiddo. (Revelation 16:14-16) In anticipation of these events, hundreds of U.S. residents are selling their homes and most of their belongings and are moving to Israel. For the benefit of any who cannot leave their homes, a prominent U.S. evangelist has reportedly promised to broadcast the return of Jesus on television—in color!

In Western lands, plans to usher in the third millennium are intensifying. People in other lands, however, are going about their business. These people—the majority of the world's population—do not believe that Jesus of Nazareth was the Messiah. Neither do they necessarily accept the B.C.-

A.D. style of dating.* Many Muslims, for example, use their own calendar, according to which next year will be 1420—not 2000. Muslims number the years from the date the prophet Muhammad fled from Mecca to Medina. All in all, people worldwide use some 40 different calendars.

Should the year 2000 have meaning for Christians? Is January 1, 2000, really a red-letter day? These questions will be answered in the following article.

* In the B.C.-A.D. system of dating, events that occurred before the traditional time of Jesus' birth are designated "B.C." years (before Christ); those that took place after are labeled "A.D." years (Anno Domini—"in the year of our Lord.") However, some informed scholars prefer to use the secular designations "B.C.E." (before our Common Era) and "C.E." (of our Common Era.)

WHEN DOES THE THIRD MILLENNIUM BEGIN?

HAVE you heard the claim that the third millennium will not begin in the year 2000 but in 2001? That claim is correct—up to a point. If we assume that Jesus Christ was born in what is now known as 1 B.C.E., as some once supposed, then December 31, 2000 (not 1999), will indeed mark the end of the second millennium, and January 1, 2001, the beginning of the third.* However, today almost all scholars agree that Jesus Christ was *not* born in 1 B.C.E. Well, then, when was he born?

When Was Jesus Born?

The Bible does not reveal the exact date of Jesus' birth. It does say, however, that he was born "in the days of Herod the king."

* See the box entitled "2000 or 2001?" on page 5.

(Matthew 2:1) Many Bible scholars believe that Herod died in the year 4 B.C.E. and that Jesus was born before then—perhaps as early as 5 or 6 B.C.E. They base their conclusions about Herod's death on statements by the first-century Jewish historian Flavius Josephus.*

According to Josephus, shortly before King Herod died, there was an eclipse of the moon. Bible scholars point to a partial lunar eclipse on March 11, 4 B.C.E., as proof that Herod must have died in that year. However, in the year 1 B.C.E., there was a total lunar eclipse on January 8 and a partial eclipse on December 27. No one can say whether Jose-

* According to the chronology of these scholars, the third millennium would have dawned in 1995 or 1996.

2000 or 2001?

To understand why some claim that the third millennium from Jesus' birth will dawn on January 1, 2001, consider this illustration. Suppose you are reading a book that is 200 pages long. When you reach the top of page 200, you have finished reading 199 pages, with one more page to read. You will not complete the book until you come to the end of page 200.

Similarly, 999 years of the present millennium, as commonly viewed, will have elapsed on December 31, 1999, with one year to go until the end of the millennium. By that reckoning, the third millennium begins on January 1, 2001. That does not mean, however, that on that date exactly 2,000 years will have elapsed from the date of Jesus' birth, as this article shows.

phus was referring to one of the eclipses in 1 B.C.E. or to the one in 4 B.C.E. Consequently, we cannot use Josephus' words to pinpoint the precise year of Herod's death. Even if we could, without more information we still could not determine when Jesus was born.

The strongest evidence we have of the date of Jesus' birth comes from the Bible. The inspired record states that Jesus' cousin John the Baptizer began his career as a prophet in the 15th year of Roman Emperor Tiberius Caesar. (Luke 3:1, 2) Secular history confirms that Tiberius was named emperor on September 15, 14 C.E., so his 15th year would run from the latter part of 28 C.E. to the latter part of 29 C.E. John began his ministry during that time, and Jesus evidently started his ministry six months later. (Luke 1:24-31) This, combined with other evidence, would place the beginning of Jesus' ministry in the fall of 29 C.E.* The Bible states that Jesus was "about thirty years old" when he began his ministry. (Luke 3:23) If he was 30 years old in the fall of 29 C.E., he must have been born in the fall of 2 B.C.E. Now, if we count forward two thousand years from the fall of 2 B.C.E. (remembering that there was no zero year;

hence, from 2 B.C.E. to 1 C.E. is two years), we realize that the second millennium ended and the third millennium began in the fall of 1999!

Does that matter? For example, would the start of the third millennium mark the beginning of the Thousand Year Reign of Jesus Christ, referred to in the book of Revelation? No. The Bible nowhere indicates any link between the third millennium and the Thousand Year Reign of Christ.

Jesus warned his followers against speculating about dates. He told his disciples: "It does not belong to you to get knowledge of the times or seasons which the Father has placed in his own jurisdiction." (Acts 1:7) Earlier, Jesus revealed that even he did not then know when God would execute judgment on this wicked system, paving the way for Christ's Millennial Rule. He said: "Concerning that day and hour nobody knows, neither the angels of the heavens nor the Son, but only the Father."—Matthew 24:36.

Is it reasonable to expect that Christ will return exactly 2,000 years from the date of his birth as a human? No, it is not. Jesus must have known the date of his own birth. And he certainly knew how to count 2,000 years from that date. Yet, he did not know the day and hour of his coming. Obviously, it would not be that simple to pinpoint the date of his return! The 'times and seasons'

* For further details, please see *Insight on the Scriptures*, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc., Volume 1, pages 1094-5.

How the B.C.-A.D. System of Dating Was Developed

Early in the sixth century C.E., Pope John I commissioned a monk named Dionysius Exiguus to develop a system of computation that would allow the churches to set an official date for Easter.

Dionysius set to work. He calculated back in time, past Jesus' death, to what he thought was the year of Jesus' birth; then he numbered each year forward from that point. Dionysius designated the period from Jesus' birth "A.D."

(for Anno Domini—"in the year of our Lord.") While intending only to devise a reliable way of calculating Easter each year, Dionysius inadvertently introduced the concept of numbering the years from the birth of Christ forward.

Although most scholars agree that Jesus was not born in the year Dionysius used as a basis for his calculations, his system of chronology does allow us to locate events in the stream of time and see their relationship to one another.

were in the Father's jurisdiction—the timetable his alone to know.

Furthermore, Jesus did not command his followers to wait for him at a specific geographic location. He told them, not to gather together and wait, but to scatter to "the most distant part of the earth" and make disciples of people of all the nations. He has never rescinded that command.—Acts 1:8; Matthew 28:19, 20.

Will Their Millennial Hopes Be Dashed?

Nevertheless, some religious fundamentalists have great expectations for the year 2000. They believe that during the next few months, portions of the book of Revelation will have a literal fulfillment. Indeed, they see themselves as sharing personally in that fulfillment. For example, they point to the prophecy recorded at Revelation 11:3, 7, 8, which tells of two witnesses who prophesy in a "great city which is in a spiritual sense called Sodom and Egypt, where their Lord was also impaled." When they finish their witnessing, the two witnesses are killed by a ferocious wild beast that comes out of an abyss.

According to a report in *The New York Times Magazine* of December 27, 1998, the leader of one religious group "has told followers he is one of the two witnesses who

is fated to announce the destruction of the earth and coming of the Lord—and then be slain by Satan in the streets of Jerusalem." Israeli authorities are understandably worried. They fear that certain extremists may try to "fulfill" the prophecy on their own—even if that means provoking an armed conflict! However, God does not need man's "help" to bring his purpose to fruition. All of the Bible's prophecies will be fulfilled in God's own time and in God's own way.

The book of Revelation was written "in signs." According to Revelation 1:1, Jesus wanted to reveal to "his slaves" (not the world in general) what would shortly take place. To understand the book of Revelation, Christ's slaves, or followers, would need God's holy spirit, which Jehovah gives to those who please him. If the book of Revelation is to be understood literally, even faithless people could read it and understand it. Then there would be no need for Christians to pray for holy spirit in order to understand it.—Matthew 13:10-15.

We have seen that according to Biblical evidence, the third millennium from Jesus' birth begins in the fall of 1999 and that neither that date nor January 1, 2000, nor January 1, 2001, has any special significance. Still, there is a millennium that deeply interests Christians. If not the third millennium, which one? The final article in this series will answer this question.

PREPARE FOR THE MILLENNIUM THAT MATTERS!

THE Thousand Year Reign of Christ will bring untold blessings to the human family. Under Jesus' loving direction, mankind will be lifted from its present sorry state to glorious perfection. Think of what that can mean for you. Radiant health! Imagine waking up each morning feeling better than the day before. Millions of men, women, and children look forward to living during that happy time. They count on it, pray for it. Their study of the Bible has convinced them that these blessings can be theirs to enjoy.

Before he begins his Thousand Year Reign, however, Jesus Christ must rid the earth of all who oppose his rulership. He will do this at the battle called Armageddon in the Bible. (Revelation 16:16) Genuine Christians on earth will not fight in that war. It is God's war. And it will not be confined to a single geographic location. The Bible says that it will reach to the farthest corners of the earth. Enemies of Christ's

rulership will be slain. None of them will escape!—Jeremiah 25:33.

Then Jesus will turn his attention to Satan the Devil and his demons. Picture the scene, as the writer of the book of Revelation saw it: "I saw an angel [Jesus Christ] coming down out of heaven with the key of the abyss and a great chain in his hand. And he seized the dragon, the original serpent, who is the Devil and Satan, and bound him for a thousand years." (Revelation 20:1, 2) Later, Satan and his demons will be destroyed forever.—Matthew 25:41.

"A great crowd, which no man [is] able to number," will survive Armageddon. (Revelation 7:9) Christ will guide these to benefit fully from "fountains of waters of life," just as a shepherd guides his sheep to lifesaving waters. (Revelation 7:17) Unhindered in their spiritual progress by Satan and his demons, these Armageddon survivors will gradually be helped to overcome their sinful tendencies until finally they reach perfection!

The Thousand Years—Literal or Symbolic?

Since most of the Bible book of Revelation was written in symbolic language, a question arises. What about the Thousand Year Reign of Christ mentioned in Revelation? Is it a literal or a symbolic period?

There is every indication that a literal thousand-year period is meant. Consider: The apostle Paul refers to the Thousand Year Reign of Christ, during which mankind is judged, as a

day. (Acts 17:31; Revelation 20:4) The apostle Peter wrote that one day (24 hours) with Jehovah is as a thousand years. (2 Peter 3:8) That would argue that this judgment "day" is literally one thousand years long. In addition, at Revelation 20:3, 5-7, we read four different times, not of "a thousand years," but of "the thousand years." This would seem to indicate a period of definite length.

Under Christ's loving rulership, living conditions will steadily improve. Jehovah God, through Jesus Christ, will eliminate all causes of pain and sorrow. He "will wipe out every tear from their eyes, and death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore." (Revelation 21:4) The prophet Isaiah rounds out the picture, saying: "At that time the eyes of the blind ones will be opened, and the very ears of the deaf ones will be unstopped. At that time the lame one will climb up just as a stag does, and the tongue of the speechless one will cry out in gladness." (Isaiah 35:5, 6) And the dead, "the great and the small," will come back to life with the prospect of never having to die again!—Revelation 20:12.

Even now, the "great crowd" that will survive Armageddon are being gathered. They are getting ready for Christ's Millennial Reign. Although they do not know when that reign will begin, they are confident that in God's due time, it will be ushered in. You can be among them, but you too must get ready—not by selling your belongings and traveling to some geographic location, but by taking in accurate knowledge of Jehovah God and his purposes through a study of the Bible. At no cost or obligation, Jehovah's Witnesses will gladly show you how a study of the Bible can benefit you and your family. The publishers of this magazine will be happy to provide further information.



HOW MUCH DO YOU LOVE GOD'S WORD?

"How I do love your law! All day long it is my concern."—PSALM 119:97.

HUNDREDS of millions of men and women own a copy of the Bible. But there is a difference between owning a Bible and loving God's Word. Can a person rightly claim to love God's Word if he seldom reads it? Of course not! In contrast, some who once had little regard for the Bible now read it every day. They have learned to love God's Word, and like the psalmist, they now make God's Word their concern "all day long."—Psalm 119:97.

² One who learned to love God's Word is Nasho Dori. Along with fellow believers, he endured for many decades, serving Jehovah in his native Albania. During much of that time, Jehovah's Witnesses were banned, and these faithful Christians received little Bible literature. Yet, Brother Dori's faith remained strong. How so? "My goal," he said, was "to read the Bible for at least an hour each day, which I did for some 60 years before my eyesight failed." Until recently, the entire Bible was not available in Albanian, but Brother Dori had learned Greek as a child, so he read the Bible in that language. Regular Bible reading sustained Brother Dori through various trials, and it can sustain us as well.

"Form a Longing" for God's Word

³ "As newborn infants," wrote the apostle

1. What is one way in which God-fearing individuals demonstrate their love for God's Word?
2. How was the faith of one of Jehovah's Witnesses sustained under difficult conditions?
3. What attitude should Christians cultivate toward God's Word?

Peter, "form a longing for the unadulterated milk belonging to the word." (1 Peter 2:2) Just as a baby craves its mother's milk, Christians who are conscious of their spiritual need find exquisite delight in reading God's Word. Is that how you feel? If not, do not despair. You too can cultivate a longing for God's Word.

⁴ In order to do so, first discipline yourself to make Bible reading a regular habit, a daily one if possible. (Acts 17:11) You may not be able to spend an hour each day in Bible reading as Nasho Dori did, but quite likely you can set aside some time each day to consider God's Word. Many Christians rise a few minutes early in order to meditate on a Bible passage. What better way could there be to start the day? Others prefer to end the day by reading the Bible just before retiring. Still others read the Bible at some other convenient time. The important thing is to read the Bible regularly. Then, take a few moments to meditate on what you have read. Let us consider some examples of individuals who benefited from reading and meditating on God's Word.

A Psalmist Who Loved God's Law

⁵ The writer of the 119th Psalm certainly had deep appreciation for God's Word.

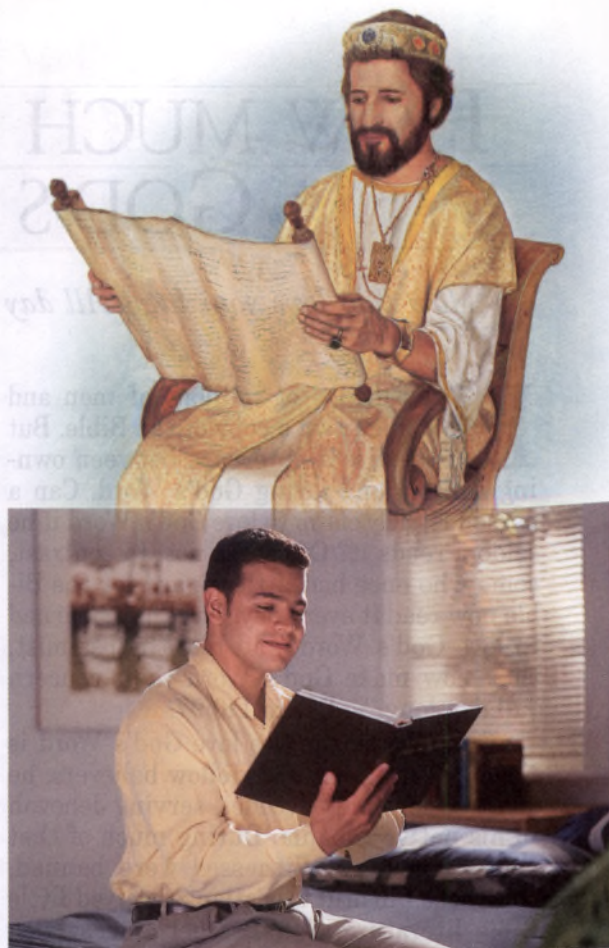
4. What is involved in making Bible reading a daily habit?
- 5, 6. Although we may not know his name, what can we learn about the writer of the 119th Psalm by reading and meditating on what he wrote?

Who wrote that psalm? The writer is not identified in the Bible. From the context, however, we learn some details about him, and we know that his life was not problem free. Some of his acquaintances who were supposed to be worshipers of Jehovah did not share his love for Bible principles. Nevertheless, the psalmist did not allow their attitude to prevent him from doing what was right. (Psalm 119:23) If you live or work with someone who does not respect Bible standards, you may see similarities between the psalmist's situation and your own.

⁶ Although a godly man, the psalmist was by no means self-righteous. He frankly acknowledged his own imperfections. (Psalm 119:5, 6, 67) However, he did not allow sin to control him. "How will a young man cleanse his path?" he asked. His answer: "By keeping on guard according to your word." (Psalm 119:9) Then, underscoring what a powerful force for good God's Word is, the psalmist added: "In my heart I have treasured up your saying, in order that I may not sin against you." (Psalm 119:11) A force that can help us avoid sinning against God is powerful indeed!

⁷ Christian youths do well to consider the psalmist's words. Young Christians are under attack today. The Devil would dearly love to corrupt the rising generation of Jehovah's worshipers. Satan's goal is to entice young Christians to give in to fleshly desires and break God's laws. Movies and television programs often reflect the Devil's thinking. The stars of such programs seem attractive and likable; immoral relations between them are portrayed as normal. The message? 'It is all right for unmarried people to

7. Why should young people especially be conscious of the need to read the Bible daily?



Faithful kings were to read God's Word regularly. Do you?

have sexual relations as long as they truly love each other.' Sadly, each year a number of young Christians fall prey to such reasoning. Some experience shipwreck of their faith. So the pressure is on! But is the pressure so intense that it is impossible for you young people to cope? By no means! Jehovah has provided a way for young Christians to overcome unwholesome desires. They can resist any weapon the Devil can devise by 'keeping on guard according to God's Word, treasuring up God's sayings in their heart.' How much time do you spend in regular personal Bible reading and meditation?

⁸ The writer of the 119th Psalm exclaimed: "How I do love your law!" (Psalm 119:97) To which law was he referring? To Jehovah's revealed word, including the Mosaic Law code. At first glance some might dismiss the Law code as outdated and wonder how anyone could love it. However, as we meditate on the various features of the Mosaic Law, as did the psalmist, we can appreciate the wisdom behind that Law. Aside from the many prophetic aspects of the Law, there are its sanitary and dietary stipulations, which promoted cleanliness and good health. (Leviticus 7:23, 24, 26; 11:2-8) The Law encouraged honesty in business practices and exhorted the Israelites to show empathy to fellow worshipers in need. (Exodus 22:26, 27; 23:6; Leviticus 19:35, 36; Deuteronomy 24:17-21) Judicial decisions were to be made with impartiality. (Deuteronomy 16:19; 19:15) As the writer of Psalm 119 gained experience in life, he no doubt saw how well things turned out for those who applied God's Law, and his fondness for it grew stronger. Similarly today, as Christians have success in applying Bible principles, their love and appreciation for God's Word intensifies.

A Prince Who Dared to Be Different

⁹ The contents of the 119th Psalm harmonize well with what we know of Hezekiah when he was still a young prince. Some Bible scholars suggest that Hezekiah was the writer of the psalm. While this is not certain, we do know that Hezekiah had great respect for God's Word. By his life course, he showed that he was in heart harmony with the words at Psalm 119:97. Of Hezekiah, the Bible states: "He kept sticking to Je-

hovah. He did not turn aside from following him, but he continued keeping his commandments that Jehovah had commanded Moses."—2 Kings 18:6.

¹⁰ By all accounts, Hezekiah did not grow up in a godly family. His father, King Ahaz, was a faithless idolater who had at least one of his sons—Hezekiah's own brother—burned alive as a sacrifice to a false god! (2 Kings 16:3) Despite this bad example, Hezekiah was able to "cleanse his path" of pagan influences by getting acquainted with God's Word.—2 Chronicles 29:2.

¹¹ As Hezekiah grew up, he saw firsthand how his idolatrous father handled affairs of State. Judah was surrounded by enemies. There was Rezin, the king of Syria, who joined with King Pekah of Israel in besieging Jerusalem. (2 Kings 16:5, 6) There were the Edomites and the Philistines, who made successful forays into Judah and even captured some Judean cities. (2 Chronicles 28:16-19) How did Ahaz deal with these crises? Instead of appealing to Jehovah for help against Syria, Ahaz turned to the king of Assyria, bribing him with gold and silver, including that from the temple treasury. But this did not bring lasting peace to Judah.—2 Kings 16:6, 8.

¹² Eventually, Ahaz died and Hezekiah became king at 25 years of age. (2 Chronicles 29:1) He was relatively young, but that did not prevent him from becoming a successful king. Rather than imitate the conduct of his unfaithful father, he stuck to Jehovah's Law. This included a special commandment for kings: "When [the king] takes his seat

10. Of what encouragement is Hezekiah's example to Christians who have not been raised by godly parents?

11. As Hezekiah watched, how did matters turn out for his unfaithful father?

12. By doing what could Hezekiah avoid repeating the mistakes of his father?

8. How can the examples outlined in this paragraph help you to grow in appreciation for the Mosaic Law?

9. What attitude did King Hezekiah cultivate toward God's Word?



Even as a boy, Jesus had a love of God's Word

on the throne of his kingdom, he must write in a book for himself a copy of this law from that which is in the charge of the priests, the Levites. And it must continue with him, and he must read in it all the days of his life, in order that he may learn to fear Jehovah *his God* so as to keep all the words of this law." (Deuteronomy 17:18, 19) By reading God's Word daily, Hezekiah would learn to fear Jehovah and avoid repeating the mistakes of his ungodly father.

¹³ Not only were the kings of Israel encouraged to give constant thought to God's Word but all God-fearing Israelites were to do so. The first Psalm describes a truly happy man as one whose "delight is in the law of Jehovah, and in his law he reads in an undertone day and night." (Psalm 1:1, 2) Of such a man, the psalmist says: "Everything

13. How can a Christian be sure that in a spiritual sense, everything he does will succeed?

he does will succeed." (Psalm 1:3) In contrast, of the one lacking faith in Jehovah God, the Bible says: "He is an indecisive man, unsteady in all his ways." (James 1:8) All of us want to be happy and successful. Regular, meaningful Bible reading can contribute to our happiness.

God's Word Sustained Jesus

¹⁴ On one occasion, Jesus' parents found him sitting in the midst of the teachers at the temple in Jerusalem. How these experts in God's Law "were in constant amazement at his understanding and his answers"! (Luke 2:46, 47) That was when Jesus was 12 years old. Yes, even at a young age, he clearly had a fondness for God's Word. Later, Jesus used the Scriptures to rebuke the Devil, saying: "Man must live, not on bread alone, but on every utterance coming forth through Jehovah's mouth." (Matthew 4:3-

14. How did Jesus show love for God's Word?

10) Soon after that, Jesus preached to the inhabitants of his hometown of Nazareth, using the Scriptures.—Luke 4:16-21.

¹⁵ Jesus frequently quoted from God's Word to support his teachings. His listeners "were astounded at his way of teaching." (Matthew 7:28) And no wonder—Jesus' teachings came from Jehovah God himself! Jesus said: "What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me. He that speaks of his own originality is seeking his own glory; but he that seeks the glory of him that sent him, this one is true, and there is no unrighteousness in him."—John 7:16, 18.

¹⁶ Unlike the writer of Psalm 119, there was "no unrighteousness" in Jesus. He was sinless, the Son of God, who "humbled himself and became obedient as far as death." (Philippians 2:8; Hebrews 7:26) Yet, perfect as he was, Jesus studied and obeyed God's Law. This was a key factor in his ability to maintain his integrity. When Peter used a sword to try to prevent his Master from being arrested, Jesus rebuked the apostle and asked: "Do you think that I cannot appeal to my Father to supply me at this moment more than twelve legions of angels? In that case, how would the Scriptures be fulfilled that it must take place this way?" (Matthew 26:53, 54) Yes, the fulfillment of the Scriptures meant more to Jesus than escaping a cruel and humiliating death. What outstanding love for God's Word!

Other Imitators of Christ

¹⁷ The apostle Paul wrote to fellow Christians: "Become imitators of me, even as I am of Christ." (1 Corinthians 11:1) Like his Master, Paul developed a fondness for

15. How did Jesus set an example when preaching to others?

16. To what extent did Jesus demonstrate his love for God's Word?

17. How important was God's Word to the apostle Paul?

the Scriptures. He confessed: "In my inmost self I dearly love God's Law." (Romans 7:22, *The Jerusalem Bible*) Paul quoted God's Word frequently. (Acts 13:32-41; 17:2, 3; 28:23) When he gave his final instructions to Timothy, a beloved fellow minister, Paul emphasized the important part that God's Word should play in the daily life of every "man of God."—2 Timothy 3:15-17.

¹⁸ Many faithful servants of Jehovah in modern times have likewise imitated Jesus' love for God's Word. Early in this century, a young man received a Bible from a friend. He described the effect of this precious gift on him: "I determined to make it a must in my life to read a portion of the Bible each and every day." That young man was Frederick Franz, and his love of the Bible led to his enjoying a long and successful life in Jehovah's service. He is fondly remembered for his ability to quote entire chapters of the Bible from memory.

¹⁹ Jehovah's Witnesses place great emphasis on regular Bible reading. Each week, in preparation for one of their Christian meetings, the Theocratic Ministry School, they read several chapters of the Bible.

18. Cite an example of one who, in modern times, showed respect for God's Word.

19. How do some schedule the weekly Bible reading for the Theocratic Ministry School?

Do You Remember?

- ☐ How did the writer of Psalm 119 manifest deep love for God's Word?
- ☐ What lessons can we draw from the examples of Jesus and of Paul?
- ☐ How can we personally grow in our love for God's Word?

Highlights of the assigned Bible reading are discussed during the meeting. Some Witnesses find it convenient to divide the week's Bible reading into seven smaller sections and read one section each day. As they read, they reflect on the material. When possible, they do additional research with the help of Bible-based publications.

²⁰ You may need to 'buy out the time'

20. What is needed in order to make time for regular Bible reading?

BENEFITS FROM LOVING GOD'S WORD

"Love [wisdom], and it will safeguard you. . . . It will glorify you because you embrace it."—PROVERBS 4:6, 8.

READING the Bible is essential for a Christian. However, merely reading it does not in itself demonstrate a love of God's Word. What if someone reads the Bible but then practices things that the Bible condemns? Obviously, he does not love God's Word in the way that the writer of Psalm 119 loved it. Loving God's Word led him to live in harmony with its requirements.—Psalm 119:97, 101, 105.

² Living in harmony with God's Word requires constant adjustment of one's thinking and way of living. Such a course reflects godly wisdom, which means to make practical application of knowledge and understanding gained from studying the Bible. "Love [wis-

1. What does truly loving God's Word involve?
2. What benefits come from wisdom based on God's Word?

from other activities in order to read the Bible regularly. (Ephesians 5:16) However, the benefits will far outweigh any sacrifices. As you develop the habit of daily Bible reading, your love for God's Word will grow. Before long, you will be moved to say with the psalmist: "How I do love your law! All day long it is my concern." (Psalm 119:97) Such an attitude will bring great benefits now and in the future, as the next article will show.

dom], and it will safeguard you. Highly esteem it, and it will exalt you. It will glorify you because you embrace it. To your head it will give a wreath of charm; a crown of beauty it will bestow upon you." (Proverbs 4:6, 8, 9) What fine encouragement to develop a love of God's Word and be guided by it! Who does not want to be safeguarded, exalted, and glorified?

Safeguarded From Lasting Harm

³ In what way is one safeguarded by wisdom gained from studying and applying God's Word? For one thing, he is safeguarded from Satan the Devil. Jesus taught his followers to pray for deliverance from the wicked one, Satan. (Matthew 6:13) To-

3. More than ever, why do Christians need to be safeguarded, and from whom?

day, the need to include this request in our prayers is truly urgent. Satan and his demons were cast out of heaven following 1914, and consequently Satan has "great anger, knowing he has a short period of time." (Revelation 12:9, 10, 12) At this late date, his anger must be white-hot as he unsuccessfully wages war against those "who observe the commandments of God and have the work of bearing witness to Jesus."—Revelation 12:17.

⁴ Satan in his wrath continues to stir up trouble for these Christian ministers and to foment violent persecution or cause other obstacles to their activity. He also wants to lure Kingdom proclaimers into focusing on such things as worldly prominence, the love of ease, the acquiring of material possessions, and the pursuit of pleasure, rather than on the Kingdom-preaching work. What safeguards God's faithful servants from surrendering to Satan's pressure or being entrapped by his snares? Of course, prayer, a close personal relationship with Jehovah, and faith in the certainty of his promises are vital. But all these are linked to a knowledge of and a determination to heed the reminders of God's Word. These reminders come through reading the Bible and Bible study aids, attending Christian meetings, heeding Scriptural counsel from a fellow believer, or simply by prayerfully meditating on Bible principles that God's spirit recalls to the mind.—Isaiah 30:21; John 14:26; 1 John 2:15-17.

⁵ Those who love God's Word are safeguarded in other ways. For example, they avoid the emotional distress and physical diseases that result from such things as drug abuse, the use of tobacco, and sexual

immorality. (1 Corinthians 5:11; 2 Corinthians 7:1) They do not contribute to strained relationships by gossip or unkind speech. (Ephesians 4:31) Neither do they fall victim to doubt by delving into the deceptive philosophies of the wisdom of the world. (1 Corinthians 3:19) By loving God's Word, they are safeguarded from things that could rob them of their relationship with God and the hope of everlasting life. They keep busy helping their neighbors to put faith in the wonderful promises contained in the Bible, knowing that they will thus 'save both themselves and those who listen to them.'—1 Timothy 4:16.

⁶ True, everyone—even those who love God's Word—is subject to "time and unforeseen occurrence." (Ecclesiastes 9:11) It is inevitable that some among us will experience natural disasters, serious sicknesses, accidents, or untimely death. Still, we are safeguarded. No calamity can bring permanent harm to a person who truly loves God's Word. Hence, we should not be overly concerned about what might happen in the future. After we take all reasonable precautions, it is better to leave matters in Jehovah's hands and not allow today's insecurity of life to rob us of peace. (Matthew 6:33, 34; Philippians 4:6, 7) Bear in mind the certainty of the resurrection hope and of a better life when God 'makes all things new.'—Revelation 21:5; John 11:25.

Prove Yourself to Be "Good Soil"

⁷ The importance of having a right view of God's Word was highlighted in one of Jesus' parables. As Jesus proclaimed the good news throughout Palestine, crowds gathered to hear him. (Luke 8:1, 4) Not all, however, really loved God's Word. No doubt, many

4. How are Christians safeguarded from satanic pressures and snares?

5. In what ways does wisdom based on God's Word safeguard us?

6. How can wisdom based on God's Word safeguard us even under difficult circumstances?

7. What illustration did Jesus tell to the crowds that came to hear him?

came to hear him because they wanted to see miracles or because they enjoyed his marvelous way of teaching. Hence, Jesus told the crowds an illustration: "A sower went out to sow his seed. Well, as he was sowing, some of it fell alongside the road and was trampled down, and the birds of heaven ate it up. Some other landed upon the rock-mass, and, after sprouting, it dried up because of not having moisture. Some other fell among the thorns, and the thorns that grew up with it choked it off. Some other fell upon the good soil, and, after sprouting, it produced fruit a hundredfold."—Luke 8:5-8.

⁸ Jesus' parable showed that there would be different responses to the preaching of the good news, depending on the heart condition of the hearer. The seed being sown is "the word of God." (Luke 8:11) Or, as another record of the parable says, the seed is "the word of the kingdom." (Matthew 13:19) Jesus could use either expression, since the theme of God's Word is the heavenly Kingdom under Jesus Christ as King by means of which Jehovah will vindicate his sovereignty and sanctify his name. (Matthew 6:9, 10) In effect, then, the seed is the message of the good news in God's Word, the Bible. Jehovah's Witnesses highlight this Kingdom message as they sow seed in imitation of the original Sower, Jesus Christ. What response do they find?

⁹ Jesus said that some seed falls by the roadside and is trodden down. This refers to people who are too preoccupied for the Kingdom seed to take root in their hearts. Before they can develop a love of God's Word, "the Devil comes and takes the word away from their hearts in order that they may not believe and be saved." (Luke 8:12) Some seed falls on a rock-mass. This refers

8. In Jesus' illustration, what is the seed?
 9. What is pictured by the seed that falls (a) by the roadside? (b) on the rock-mass? (c) on thorny ground?



Garo Nalbadian

The seed of Jesus' illustration pictures the message of good news contained in God's Word

to people who are attracted to the Bible's message but do not let it affect their hearts. When opposition comes or when they find it hard to apply Bible counsel, "they fall away" because they have no root. (Luke 8:13) Then there are those who hear the word but are overwhelmed by the "anxieties and riches and pleasures of this life." Eventually, like plants entangled by thorns, "they are completely choked."—Luke 8:14.

- ¹⁰ Finally, there is the seed that falls on good soil. This points to people who receive the message with "a fine and good heart." Naturally, each of us would like to
 10, 11. (a) Who are pictured by the good soil? (b) What must we do to "retain" God's Word in our hearts?

believe that he falls into this category. In the final analysis, though, it is God's view that counts. (Proverbs 17:3; 1 Corinthians 4:4, 5) His Word says that our having "a fine and good heart" is something that we prove by our actions from now until our death or until God brings an end to this wicked system of



Jehovah's Witnesses imitate the Great Sower

things. If our initial response to the Kingdom message is positive, that is fine. However, those with a fine and good heart accept God's Word and "retain it and bear fruit with endurance."—Luke 8:15.

¹¹ The only sure way to retain God's Word in our heart is to read and study it both

privately and in association with fellow believers. This includes taking full advantage of the spiritual food provided through the channel appointed to care for the spiritual interests of Jesus' true followers. (Matthew 24:45-47) By such means, those who retain God's Word in their hearts are motivated by love to "bear fruit with endurance."

¹² What fruit is born by the fine soil? In the natural world, seeds grow into plants that bear fruit containing the same kind of seed, which can then be scattered to bear further fruit. Similarly, for those with a fine and good heart, the seed of the word grows in them, causing them to progress spiritually until they, in their turn, can sow the seed in the hearts of others. (Matthew 28:19, 20) And their work of sowing is marked by endurance. Jesus showed the importance of endurance in sowing when he said: "He that has endured to the end is the one that will be saved. And this good news of the kingdom will be preached in all the inhabited earth for a witness to all the nations; and then the end will come."—Matthew 24:13, 14.

"Bearing Fruit in Every Good Work"

¹³ The apostle Paul too spoke of the need to bear fruit, and he linked bearing fruit with God's Word. He prayed that his fellow believers "be filled with the accurate knowledge of [God's] will in all wisdom and spiritual comprehension, in order to walk worthily of Jehovah to the end of fully pleasing him as you go on bearing fruit in every good work."—Colossians 1:9, 10; Philippians 1:9-11.

¹⁴ Paul thus shows that gaining Bible

12. What is the fruit we must bear with endurance?

13. What prayer did Paul utter that linked fruitage with knowledge of God's Word?

14-16. In harmony with Paul's prayer, what fruitage is produced by those who love God's Word?



Armageddon survivors will enjoy the fruits of the earth

knowledge is not an end in itself. Rather, love for God's Word motivates us to "walk worthily of Jehovah" by continuing to 'bear fruit in every good work.' What good work? Preaching the good news of the Kingdom is the outstanding assignment for Christians in these last days. (Mark 13:10) In addition, those who love God's Word do their best to give regular financial support to this work. They delight in this privilege, knowing that "God loves a cheerful giver." (2 Corinthians 9:7) Their contributions go toward defraying the cost of operating the more than one hundred Bethel facilities from which the activity of Kingdom preaching is directed and in some of which Bibles and Bible literature are produced. Their contributions also help to defray the costs of large Christian conventions and of sending out traveling overseers, missionaries, and other full-time evangelizers.

¹⁵ Other good works involve the constructing of and caring for centers of true worship.

Love for God's Word motivates his worshipers to ensure that Assembly Halls and Kingdom Halls do not fall into neglect. (Compare Nehemiah 10:39.) Since God's name appears on the front of such buildings, it is vital that inside and outside they be kept clean and attractive and that the conduct of those who worship inside such halls be above reproach. (2 Corinthians 6:3) Some Christians are able to do more. Love for God's Word moves them to travel long distances in order to share in building new places of worship in parts of the world where there is a need because of poverty or a lack of skills.—2 Corinthians 8:14.

¹⁶ "Bearing fruit in every good work" also includes caring for family obligations and showing concern for fellow Christians. Love for God's Word motivates us to be sensitive to the needs of those "related to us in the faith" and "to practice godly devotion in [our] own household." (Galatians 6:10; 1 Timothy 5:4, 8) In this regard, it is a

good work to visit the sick and comfort the mourning ones. And what fine work is accomplished by congregation elders and Hospital Liaison Committees in assisting individuals who face challenging medical situations! (Acts 15:29) Then there are a growing number of disasters—some of them natural and others caused by human folly. With the help of God's spirit, Jehovah's Witnesses have built up a fine record in many parts of the earth of providing quick relief to fellow believers and other victims of disasters and accidents. All of these are good fruits manifested by those who love God's Word.

Glorious Future Benefits

¹⁷ The sowing of Kingdom seed continues to bring great benefits to mankind. In recent years more than 300,000 persons each year have allowed the Bible's message to take root in their hearts to the extent that they have dedicated their lives to Jehovah and symbolized this by means of water baptism. What a glorious future awaits them!

¹⁸ Soon, lovers of God's Word know that Jehovah God will rise up to magnify his name. "Babylon the Great," the world empire of false religion, will be destroyed. (Revelation 18:2, 8) Then, those who refuse to live in harmony with God's Word will be put to death by the King, Jesus Christ. (Psalm 2:9-11; Daniel 2:44) Afterward, God's Kingdom will bring permanent relief from crime, war, and other disasters. There will no longer be a need to comfort people because of pain, sickness, and death.—Revelation 21:3, 4.

¹⁹ What glorious good works will then be accomplished by those who love God's Word! Armageddon survivors will start with the

17, 18. (a) What is being accomplished by the sowing of Kingdom seed? (b) What earthshaking events will lovers of God's Word soon witness? 19, 20. What glorious future is in store for those who truly love God's Word?

joyful task of transforming this earth into a paradise. They will have the thrilling privilege of preparing for the needs of dead humans who are now resting in the grave and held in God's memory with the prospect of sharing in the resurrection of the dead. (John 5:28, 29) During that time, perfect direction will flow to earth's inhabitants from the Sovereign Lord, Jehovah, through his exalted Son, Jesus Christ. 'Scrolls will be opened,' revealing Jehovah's instructions for new world living.—Revelation 20:12.

²⁰ In Jehovah's due time, the complete body of faithful anointed Christians will be raised to their heavenly reward as "joint heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:17) During the Thousand Year Reign of Christ, all humans on earth who love God's Word will be uplifted to perfection of mind and body. After proving faithful under a final test, they will be rewarded with everlasting life and will come to enjoy "the glorious freedom of the children of God." (Romans 8:21; Revelation 20:1-3, 7-10) What a wonderful time that will be! Truly, whether Jehovah has granted us a heavenly or an earthly hope, an enduring love of his Word and a determination to live according to godly wisdom will safeguard us. And in the future it 'will glorify us because we embrace it.'—Proverbs 4:6, 8.

Can You Explain?

- ☐ How will love for God's Word safeguard us?
- ☐ What is the seed of Jesus' illustration, and how is it sown?
- ☐ How can we prove to be "good soil"?
- ☐ What benefits can lovers of God's Word anticipate?

WHEN GENEROSITY ABOUNDS

IF YOU had the opportunity to present a gift to a king, what would you give him? What if he were the wealthiest and wisest ruler in the world? Could you think of any gift that would please him? Some three thousand years ago, the queen of Sheba had to ponder those questions while preparing to visit just such a ruler—King Solomon of Israel.

Her gift, the Bible tells us, included 120 talents of gold “and a very great deal of balsam oil and precious stones.” At today’s prices, the gold alone was worth about \$40,-000,000. Balsam oil, an aromatic and medicinal oil, was ranked with gold as a precious commodity. While the Bible does not say how much oil the queen gave Solomon, it does tell us that her gift remained unequaled.—1 Kings 10:10.

The queen of Sheba was obviously a wealthy and generous woman. What is more, her generosity was returned to her. “King Solomon,” the Bible says, “gave the queen of Sheba all her delight for which she had asked, *besides the value of what she brought to the king.*” (2 Chronicles 9:12) True, it may have been the custom for royalty to exchange gifts; yet, the Bible specifically mentions Solomon’s “openhandedness.” (1 Kings 10:13) Solomon himself wrote: “The generous soul will itself be made fat, and the one freely watering others will himself also be freely watered.”—Proverbs 11:25.

Of course, the queen of Sheba also made a big sacrifice in time and effort to visit Solomon. Apparently Sheba was in the area of the present-day Republic of Yemen; so the queen and her camel train traveled well over 1,000 miles to Jerusalem. As Je-

sus said, “she came from the ends of the earth.” Why did the queen of Sheba go to so much trouble? She came primarily “to hear the wisdom of Solomon.”—Luke 11:31.

First Kings 10:1, 2 says that the queen of Sheba “came to test [Solomon] with perplexing questions. . . . [She] began to speak to him all that happened to be close to her heart.” How did Solomon respond? “Solomon, in turn, went on to tell her all her matters. There proved to be no matter hidden from the king that he did not tell her.”—1 Kings 10:3.

Astounded at what she heard and saw, the queen humbly replied: “Happy are these servants of yours who are standing before you constantly, listening to your wisdom!” (1 Kings 10:4-8) She did not pronounce Solomon’s servants happy because they were surrounded by opulence—although they were. Rather, Solomon’s servants were blessed because they could constantly listen to Solomon’s God-given wisdom. What a fine example the queen of Sheba is for Jehovah’s people today, who bask in the wisdom of the Creator himself and that of his Son, Jesus Christ!

Also noteworthy was the queen’s next comment to Solomon: “May Jehovah your God come to be blessed.” (1 Kings 10:9) Evidently, she saw Jehovah’s hand in Solomon’s wisdom and prosperity. This accords with what Jehovah earlier promised to Israel. ‘Keeping my regulations,’ he said, “is wisdom on your part and understanding on your part before the eyes of the peoples who will hear of all these regulations, and they will certainly say, ‘This great nation is undoubtedly a wise and understanding people.’”—Deuteronomy 4:5-7.

Coming to the Giver of Wisdom

In modern times, millions have also been drawn to Jehovah's organization because they have perceived that "the Israel of God" are "a wise and understanding people," not by nature, but because God's perfect laws and principles guide them. (Galatians 6:16) Baptism figures show that in recent years hundreds of thousands of new disciples each year have said, in effect, to spiritual Israel: "We will go with you people, for we have heard that God is with you people." (Zechariah 8:23) How amazed these new ones are when they see the banquet of spiritual food that Jehovah has spread before his servants! They had never seen the like of it in their former religions.—Isaiah 25:6.

Giving to the Greatest Giver

Having received so much, appreciative ones naturally wonder what they in return can give to the greatest King and Giver, Jehovah God. The Bible reveals that the best gift we can give to Jehovah is "a sacrifice of praise." (Hebrews 13:15) Why? Because this sacrifice is directly related to the saving of life, a major concern of Jehovah in this time of the end. (Ezekiel 18:23) Additionally, giving of one's strength and time to help the sick, the depressed, and others is an acceptable sacrifice.—1 Thessalonians 5:14; Hebrews 13:16; James 1:27.

Financial contributions play a key role. They make possible the production of Bibles, Bible-based literature, and the obtaining of places where Christians can congregate. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Contributions also provide relief funds to help victims of wars and natural disasters.

To guide us in the matter of giving, God's Word sets out some fine principles. For example, it teaches that Christians give, not some set amount, but what they are reasonably able to give, doing so willingly, out of

a cheerful heart. (2 Corinthians 9:7) Some can give much; others, like the needy widow in Jesus' time, may be able to give only a little. (Luke 21:2-4) Is it not remarkable that Jehovah—the Owner of the entire universe—values every well-motivated gift and sacrifice made in his name?—Hebrews 6:10.

In order that they may give cheerfully, Jehovah's people are kept informed of various needs and of effective ways in which those needs can be met. Jehovah's holy spirit, in turn, moves willing hearts to respond. In ancient Israel this procedure was followed in the building of the tabernacle and, later, the temple. (Exodus 25:2; 35:5, 21, 29; 36:5-7; 39:32; 1 Chronicles 29:1-19) In the first century C.E., that same procedure enabled Christians to have the resources they needed to take the good news of the Kingdom to the nations and to support the brothers in Israel during a famine.—1 Corinthians 16:2-4; 2 Corinthians 8:4, 15; Colossians 1:23.

Likewise today, Jehovah has blessed his people, and he will continue to bless them, by giving them what they need to complete the greatest preaching and teaching campaign the world has ever seen.—Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20.

What Are the Present Needs?

In recent years Jehovah's Witnesses have been registered in many countries where their work was previously restricted. As a result, many of these lands have seen a tremendous growth in the number of publishers. Understandably, Bibles and Bible-based literature is in great demand.

So are Kingdom Halls. Some 9,000 new Kingdom Halls are needed around the world right now. If one Kingdom Hall were to be built each day, it would require more than 24 years to meet present needs! Meantime, about seven new congregations are being formed daily, many of them in parts of the

Ways in Which Some Choose to Give CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE WORLDWIDE WORK

MANY set aside, or budget, an amount that they place in the contribution boxes labeled "Contributions for the Society's Worldwide Work—Matthew 24:14." Each month congregations forward these amounts either to the world headquarters in Brooklyn, New York, or to the local branch office.

Voluntary donations of money may also be sent directly to the Treasurer's Office, **Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania, 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, New York 11201-2483**, or to the Society's office that serves your country. Jewelry or other valuables may be donated as well. A brief letter stating that such is an outright gift should accompany these contributions.

CONDITIONAL-DONATION ARRANGEMENT

Money may be given to the Watch Tower Society under a special arrangement in which, should the donor have a personal need, the donation will be returned to him. For more information, please contact the Treasurer's Office at the address noted above.

CHARITABLE PLANNING

In addition to outright gifts of money and conditional donations of money, there are other methods of giving to benefit Kingdom service worldwide. These include:

Insurance: The Watch Tower Society may be named as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or in a retirement/pension plan.

Bank Accounts: Bank accounts, certificates of deposit, or individual retirement accounts may be placed in trust for or made payable on death to the Watch Tower Society, in accord with local bank requirements.

Stocks and Bonds: Stocks and bonds may be donated to the Watch Tower Society either as an outright gift or under an arrangement whereby income continues to be paid to the donor.

Real Estate: Salable real estate may be donated to the Watch Tower Society either by making an

outright gift or by reserving a life estate to the donor, who can continue to live therein during his or her lifetime. One should contact the Society before deeding any real estate to the Society.

Wills and Trusts: Property or money may be bequeathed to the Watch Tower Society by means of a legally executed will, or the Society may be named as a beneficiary of a trust agreement. A trust benefiting a religious organization may provide certain tax advantages.

As the term "charitable planning" implies, these types of donations typically require some planning on the part of the donor. To assist individuals desiring to benefit the Society through some form of charitable planning, the Society has prepared an English-language brochure entitled *Planned Giving to Benefit Kingdom Service Worldwide*. The brochure was written in response to the many inquiries the Society has received regarding gifts, wills, and trusts. It also contains additional useful information on estate, financial, and tax planning. And it is designed to help individuals in the United States who are planning to make a special gift to the Society now or to leave a bequest at death to select the most advantageous and efficient method in the light of their family and personal circumstances. This brochure may be obtained by requesting a copy directly from the Charitable Planning Office.

After reading the brochure and conferring with the Charitable Planning Office, many have been able to assist the Society and at the same time, maximize the tax benefits of doing so. The Charitable Planning Office should be informed of and receive a copy of any relevant document pertaining to any of these arrangements. If you are interested in any of these charitable planning arrangements, you should contact the Charitable Planning Office, either in writing or by telephone, at the address listed below or at the Society's office that serves your country.

CHARITABLE PLANNING OFFICE

Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of
Pennsylvania

100 Watchtower Drive,

Patterson, New York 12563-9204

Telephone: (914) 306-1000

world where finances are limited. On the other hand, many of these places do not require expensive buildings. In some places, a Kingdom Hall that fills the need and serves as a good witness to the community can be completed for as little as \$6,000.

In the first century, certain Christians were better off financially than were others, so the apostle Paul wrote: "By means of an equalizing your surplus just now might offset their deficiency, in order that their surplus might also come to offset your deficiency, that an equalizing might take place." (2 Corinthians 8:14) Today, a similar "equalizing" is providing funds needed to supply Bibles, Bible literature, Kingdom Halls, disaster relief, and other things in many parts of the world. What a blessing such giving is—both to the giver and to the receiver!—Acts 20:35.

As indicated by the letters the Society receives from generous-hearted people, many readers of this magazine wish to help out but are unsure of the various ways in which contributions can be made. No doubt the accompanying box will help to answer their questions.

During Solomon's glorious reign, "all the kings of the earth" who heard of him came to visit him. Yet, the Bible names only one ruler—the queen of Sheba. (2 Chronicles 9:



The activities of Jehovah's Witnesses are supported by voluntary donations

23) What a sacrifice she made! But she was richly rewarded—so much so that by the end of her visit, she was left "breathless and amazed."—2 Chronicles 9:4, *Today's English Version*.

In the future, Jehovah, the greatest King and Giver, will do much more than Solomon ever could for those who make sacrifices for Him. In response, these will stand "breathless and amazed," for not only will Jehovah preserve them through his fear-inspiring day of judgment but thereafter he will 'open his hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing.'—Psalm 145:16.





JEHOVAH IS A GOD OF LOVING-KINDNESS TO ME

AS TOLD BY JOHN ANDRONIKOS

The year was 1956. Only nine days into my marriage, here I was standing before an appeal court in Komotiní, northern Greece. My hope was that the 12-month sentence I had received for preaching God's Kingdom would be annulled. The decision of the appeal court—six months in prison—dashed that hope and proved to be just the beginning of a long series of trials. Through it all, however, Jehovah proved to be a God of loving-kindness to me.

WHEN I was born on October 1, 1931, my family was living in the city of Kavála, the Neapolis of Macedonia visited by the apostle Paul during his second missionary tour. Mom became one of Jehovah's Witnesses when I was five years old, and though she was almost illiterate, she did her best to inculcate in me a love of God and a fear of him. My father was an extremely conservative man who stubbornly clung to the Greek Orthodox tradition. He had no interest in Bible truth and opposed my mother, often resorting to violence.

Thus, I grew up in a divided household, where Father beat and abused Mother and even abandoned us. From my early childhood, Mom took me and my little sister to Christian meetings. However, when I turned

15, youthful desires and the spirit of independence turned me away from Jehovah's Witnesses. Nevertheless, my faithful mother tried very hard, and she shed many tears in her efforts to help me.

Because of poverty and the bad life I was leading, I became seriously ill and had to stay in bed for more than three months. It was then that a very humble brother, who had helped my mother learn the truth, discerned in me a sincere love for God. He felt that I could be helped to recover spiritually. Others told him: "You are wasting your time trying to help John; he will never pull himself together." But the patience of this brother and his perseverance in assisting me bore fruit. On August 15, 1952, at the age of 21, I symbolized my dedication to Jehovah by water baptism.

Newlywed and in Prison

Three years later I became acquainted with Martha, a spiritually-minded sister with outstanding qualities, and soon we got engaged. One day I was really taken aback when Martha told me: "Today I plan to preach from door to door. Do you want to come with me?" Until then I had never participated in this feature of the work, having preached mostly informally. At that time the preaching work in Greece was under ban, and we had to carry on our preaching activity underground. There were numerous arrests, court cases, and severe prison sentences as a result. Still, I could not say no to my fiancée!

Martha became my wife in 1956. It was then, nine days after our wedding, that I received the six-month prison sentence from that appeal court in Komotini. This brought to my mind a question I had posed some time earlier to a Christian sister, a friend of my mother's: "How can I possibly show that I am a true Witness of Jehovah? I have never had the opportunity to prove my faith." When this sister came to see me in prison, she reminded me of that question and said: "Now you can show Jehovah how much you love him. This is your assignment."

When I learned that my lawyer tried to raise money to bail me out of jail, I told him that I would prefer to see my sentence through. How glad I was at the end of the six-month imprisonment to see two of my fellow inmates accept the truth! During the following years, I was involved in scores of court cases for the sake of the good news.

Choices We Have Never Regretted

In 1959, a couple of years after my release, I was serving as a congregation servant, or presiding overseer, and was invited to attend the Kingdom Ministry School, a training course for congregation elders. At the

**With Martha
in 1956**



same time, though, I was offered a permanent position in a public hospital, a job that would give me and my family financial security for life. What should I choose? I had already been working temporarily in the hospital for three months, and the director was very enthusiastic about my work, but when the invitation to the school arrived, he would not allow me to take even an unpaid leave of absence. After giving prayerful thought to the dilemma, I decided to put the interests of the Kingdom first and reject the job offer. —Matthew 6:33.

About that same time, the district and circuit overseers came to serve our congregation. We had to hold our meetings secretly in private houses because of the staunch opposition of the Greek Orthodox clergy and the authorities. After one of the meetings, the district overseer approached me and asked if I had thought of taking up the full-time service. His suggestion touched a chord in my heart because this had been my dream since I was baptized. I answered: "I want to very much." However, I already had the added responsibility of raising a daughter. The brother told me: "Trust in Jehovah, and he will help you realize your plans." Thus,



The harbor in Kavála

**With Martha
in 1997**



without neglecting our family responsibilities, my wife and I were able to adjust our circumstances, so that in December 1960, I started serving in eastern Macedonia as a special pioneer—one of only five special pioneers in the country.

After I had worked as a special pioneer for one year, the branch office in Athens invited me to serve as a traveling overseer. When I returned home from one month of training in this form of service, and while still relating my experiences to Martha, the director of a large manganese mine visited and invited me to become the manager of the refining division, offering me a generous five-year contract, a fine house, and an automobile. He gave me two days to reply. Again, without hesitating at all, I prayed to Jehovah: “Here I am, send me.” (Isaiah 6:8) My wife was in full agreement. Trusting in God, we began the traveling work, and Jehovah in his loving-kindness never let us down.

Serving Through Thick and Thin

Although there were economic problems, we moved ahead and Jehovah provided the necessities. In the beginning, I used to visit the congregations on a small motorcycle, covering distances of up to 300 miles. Many times I had difficulties, and there were a few accidents. On the way back from a congregation during one winter, I was crossing a swollen stream when the motor died, and I got soaked to the knees. Then the motorcycle had a flat tire. A passerby who had a pump helped me, and thus I was able to reach the nearest village where I repaired the tire. I finally reached home at three o'clock in the morning, frozen and exhausted.

On another occasion, as I was going from one congregation to another, the motorcycle skidded and fell on my knee. As a result, my trousers were torn and soaked with blood. I did not have another pair of trousers, so that evening I delivered the talk in another

er brother's trousers, which were rather too big for me. Still, no difficulty could dampen my desire to serve Jehovah and the beloved brothers.

In another accident, I was badly injured, breaking my arm and my front teeth. It was then that I received a visit from my sister, not a Witness, who lived in the United States. What a relief it was when she helped me to buy an automobile! When the brothers at the Athens branch learned about my accident, they sent me an encouraging letter, and among other things they included the words of Romans 8:28, which say in part: "God makes all his works cooperate together for the good of those who love God." Again and again, this assurance has proved very true in my life!

A Pleasant Surprise

In 1963, I was working with a special pioneer in a village where the people were unresponsive. We decided to work separately, each taking one side of the street. At one house, no sooner had I knocked on the door than a woman urgently pulled me inside and shut and locked the door behind me. I was bewildered, wondering what was happening. Shortly afterward, she also hurriedly called the special pioneer into the house. Then the lady told us: "Hush! Do not even move!" After a while, we heard hostile voices outside. People were looking for us. When things had quieted down, the lady told us: "I did this for your own protection. I respect you because I believe that you are true Christians." We sincerely thanked her and departed, leaving her with many pieces of literature.

Fourteen years later, while I was attending a district convention in Greece, a woman approached me and said: "Brother, do you remember me? I am the woman who sheltered you from the opposers when you came to our village to give a witness." She had im-

migrated to Germany, studied the Bible, and associated with Jehovah's people. Now, her whole family was in the truth.

Indeed, during all these years, we have been blessed with many "letters of recommendation." (2 Corinthians 3:1) A number of those whom we had the privilege to help acquire a knowledge of Bible truth are now serving as elders, ministerial servants, and pioneers. How thrilling it is to see the handful of publishers in the circuits I served back in the early 1960's increase to more than 10,000 worshipers of Jehovah! All credit goes to our God of loving-kindness, who uses us in his own way.

"Upon a Divan of Illness"

During our years in the traveling work, Martha proved to be an outstanding helpmate, always having a joyful attitude. In October 1976, however, she became seriously ill and underwent a painful operation. She ended up a paraplegic in a wheelchair. How could we cope with the expense and emotional distress? Trusting in Jehovah once again, we experienced his loving and generous hand. When I departed to serve in Macedonia, Martha stayed at a brother's house in Athens for physical therapy. She would phone me with the encouraging words: "I am fine. You carry on, and when I am mobile again, I will accompany you in

In Our Next Issue

Can the Bible Help Us Today?

**Dedication of the Watchtower
Educational Center
—A Festival to Jehovah**

Remember Your Grand Creator!

my wheelchair.” And that is exactly what she did. Our beloved brothers from Bethel sent us many encouraging letters. Martha was repeatedly reminded of the words at Psalm 41:3: “Jehovah himself will sustain him upon a divan of illness; all his bed you will certainly change during his sickness.”

Because of these serious health problems, in 1986 it was decided that it would be appropriate for me to serve as a special pioneer in Kavála, where I live near the family of our dear daughter. Last March my dear Martha passed away, faithful to the end. Before she died, when brothers would ask her: “How are you?” she usually replied: “Since I am close to Jehovah, I am very well!” When we prepared for the meetings or received tempting invitations to serve in areas where the harvest is plentiful, Martha used to say: “John, let us go to serve where the need is greater.” She never lost her zealous spirit.

Some years ago, I too had to cope with a severe health problem. In March 1994, I

was diagnosed with a life-threatening heart problem, and surgery was imperative. Once again I felt Jehovah’s loving hand supporting me through a critical period. I will never forget the prayer that a circuit overseer offered at my bedside when I got out of intensive care, as well as the celebration of the Memorial that I conducted right there in my hospital room with four patients who had shown some interest in the truth.

Jehovah Has Been Our Helper

Time flies, and our flesh weakens, but our spirit is renewed through study and service. (2 Corinthians 4:16) It has now been 39 years since I said, “Here I am! Send me.” It has been a full, happy, and rewarding life. Yes, sometimes I feel that “I am afflicted and poor,” but then I can say with confidence to Jehovah: “You are my assistance and the Provider of escape for me.” (Psalm 40:17) He has indeed been a God of loving-kindness to me.

QUESTIONS FROM READERS

How do Jehovah’s Witnesses view voting?

There are clear principles set out in the Bible that enable servants of God to take a proper view of this matter. However, there appears to be no principle against the practice of voting itself. For example, there is no reason why a board of directors should not take a vote in order to arrive at decisions affecting their corporation. Congregations of Jehovah’s Witnesses often make decisions about meeting times and the use of congregation funds by voting with a show of hands.

What, though, of voting in political elections? Of course, in some democratic lands, as many as 50 percent of the population do not turn out to vote on election day. As for Jehovah’s Witnesses, they do not interfere with the right of others to vote; neither do they in any way campaign

against political elections. They respect and cooperate with the authorities who are duly elected in such elections. (Romans 13:1-7) As to whether they will personally vote for someone running in an election, each one of Jehovah’s Witnesses makes a decision based on his Bible-trained conscience and an understanding of his responsibility to God and to the State. (Matthew 22:21; 1 Peter 3:16) In making this personal decision, the Witnesses consider a number of factors.

First, Jesus Christ said of his followers: “They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world.” (John 17:14) Jehovah’s Witnesses take this principle seriously. Being “no part of the world,” they are neutral in the political affairs of the world.—John 18:36.

Second, the apostle Paul referred to himself as

an "ambassador" representing Christ to the people of his day. (Ephesians 6:20; 2 Corinthians 5:20) Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Christ Jesus is now the enthroned King of God's heavenly Kingdom, and they, like ambassadors, must announce this to the nations. (Matthew 24:14; Revelation 11:15) Ambassadors are expected to be neutral and not to interfere in the internal affairs of the countries to which they are sent. As representatives of God's heavenly Kingdom, Jehovah's Witnesses feel a similar obligation not to interfere in the politics of the countries where they reside.

A third factor to consider is that those who have a part in voting a person into office may become responsible for what he does. (Compare 1 Timothy 5:22, *The New English Bible*.) Christians have to consider carefully whether they want to shoulder that responsibility.

Fourth, Jehovah's Witnesses greatly value their Christian unity. (Colossians 3:14) When religions get involved in politics, the result is often division among their members. In imitation of Jesus Christ, Jehovah's Witnesses avoid becoming involved in politics and thus maintain their Christian unity.—Matthew 12:25; John 6:15; 18:36, 37.

Fifth and finally, their keeping out of politics gives Jehovah's Witnesses freeness of speech to approach people of all political persuasions with the important message of the Kingdom.—Hebrews 10:35.

In view of the Scriptural principles outlined above, in many lands Jehovah's Witnesses make a personal decision not to vote in political elections, and their freedom to make that decision is supported by the law of the land. What, though, if the law requires citizens to vote? In such a case, each Witness is responsible to make a conscientious, Bible-based decision about how to handle the situation. If someone decides to go to the polling booth, that is his decision. What he does in the polling booth is between him and his Creator.

The November 15, 1950, issue of *The Watchtower*, on pages 445 and 446, said: "Where Caesar makes it compulsory for citizens to vote . . . [Witnesses] can go to the polls and enter the

voting booths. It is here that they are called upon to mark the ballot or write in what they stand for. The voters do what they will with their ballots. So here in the presence of God is where his witnesses must act in harmony with his commandments and in accordance with their faith. It is not our responsibility to instruct them what to do with the ballot."

What if a Christian woman's unbelieving husband insists that she present herself to vote? Well, she is subject to her husband, just as Christians are subject to the superior authorities. (Ephesians 5:22; 1 Peter 2:13-17) If she obeys her husband and goes to the polling booth, that is her personal decision. No one should criticize her.—Compare Romans 14:4.

What of a country where voting is not mandated by law but feelings run high against those who do not go to the voting booth—perhaps they are exposed to physical danger? Or what if individuals, while not legally obliged to vote, are severely penalized in some way if they do not go to the polling booth? In these and similar situations, a Christian has to make his own decision. "Each one will carry his own load."—Galatians 6:5.

There may be people who are stumbled when they observe that during an election in their country, some Witnesses of Jehovah go to the polling booth and others do not. They may say, 'Jehovah's Witnesses are not consistent.' People should recognize, though, that in matters of individual conscience such as this, each Christian has to make his own decision before Jehovah God.—Romans 14:12.

Whatever personal decisions Jehovah's Witnesses make in the face of different situations, they take care to preserve their Christian neutrality and freeness of speech. In all things, they rely on Jehovah God to strengthen them, give them wisdom, and help them avoid compromising their faith in any way. Thus they show confidence in the words of the psalmist: "You are my crag and my stronghold; and for the sake of your name you will lead me and conduct me."—Psalm 31:3.

A Voluntary Offering to Advance Pure Worship

THE Israelites were eyewitnesses of Jehovah's saving power. They saw the waters of the Red Sea miraculously divide, allowing them to cross on dry ground and escape the Egyptian army. On the other side, they watched from a safe distance as those same waters came crashing in upon their pursuers. Jehovah had saved their lives!—Exodus 14:21-31.

Sadly, though, some Israelites took for granted what their God had done. While Moses was on Mount Sinai, they presented their gold jewelry to Aaron and demanded that he make an idol for them to worship. Upon returning, Moses found this crowd of rebels eating, drinking, dancing, and bowing down to a golden calf! At Jehovah's direction some 3,000—likely the prime instigators of the rebellion—were put to death. That day, God's people learned an important lesson about the need to give Jehovah exclusive devotion.—Exodus 32:1-6, 19-29.

Soon after this incident, Moses got ready to carry out God's command to build a tabernacle, a transportable tent of worship. This construction project would require expensive materials and skilled laborers. From where would these come? And what can we learn from this Bible account?

Contribution of Materials and Skills

Through Moses, Jehovah commanded the Israelites: "Take up a contribution for Jehovah. Let every willing-hearted one bring it as Jehovah's contribution." What type of contribution? Among the items Moses listed were gold, silver, copper, yarns, fabrics, skins, wood, and precious stones.—Exodus 35:5-9.

The Israelites had more than sufficient means to

make such a generous contribution. Remember, when they left Egypt, they took with them articles of gold and of silver, along with many garments. Indeed, "they stripped the Egyptians."* (Exodus 12:35, 36) Previously, the Israelites had willingly shed their jewelry to make an idol for false worship. Would they now show themselves just as eager to make an offering to advance true worship?

Note that Moses did not stipulate a precise amount that each one should give, nor did he use guilt or shame to motivate the giving. Instead, he simply appealed to "every willing-hearted one." Moses evidently felt no need to coerce God's people. He was confident that each one would give all that he or she could.—Compare 2 Corinthians 8:10-12.

However, the building project would require more than a donation of materials. Jehovah also told the Israelites: "Let all the wise-hearted ones among you come and make all that Jehovah has commanded." Yes, this building project called for skilled labor. Indeed, "every sort of craftsmanship"—including woodworking, metalworking, and jewelery—would be needed to complete this project. Of course, Jehovah would direct the workers' talents, and credit for the success of the project would rightly go to him.—Exodus 35:10, 30-35; 36:1, 2.

The Israelites eagerly responded to the invitation to give of both their resources and their skills.

* This was not thievery. The Israelites asked for contributions from the Egyptians, and these were given freely. Besides, since the Egyptians had had no right to enslave Israel in the first place, they owed God's people wages for their years of hard labor.



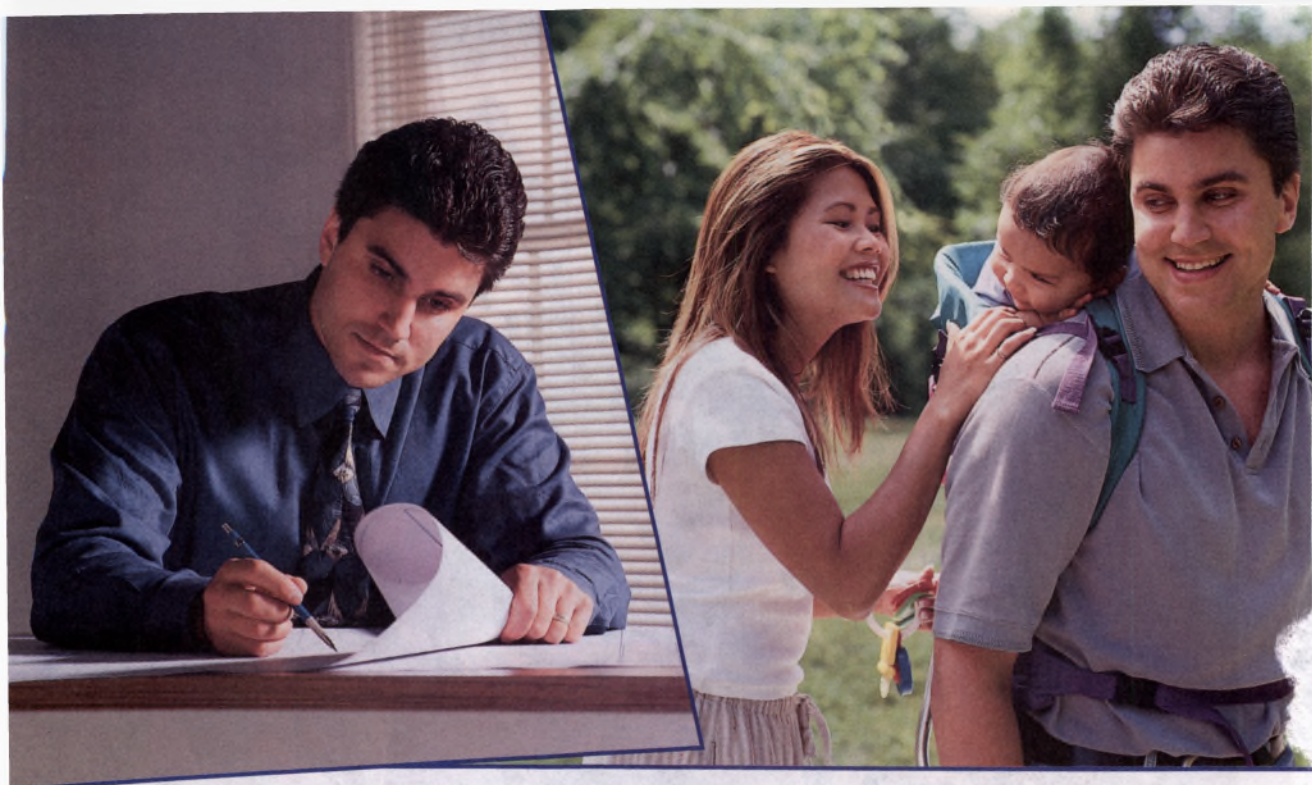
The Bible account states: "They came, everyone whose heart impelled him, and they brought, everyone whose spirit incited him, Jehovah's contribution for the work of the tent of meeting and for all its service and for the holy garments. And they kept coming, the men along with the women, every willing-hearted one."—Exodus 35:21, 22.

Lesson for Us

Today the monumental task of preaching the good news of God's Kingdom is accomplished by means of voluntary donations. Often, these are monetary. In other cases, Christian brothers and sisters use their wealth of experience in helping to construct Kingdom Halls, Assembly Halls, and branch facilities. Then there is the work done at more than a hundred Bethel homes around the world, work that entails many different skills. All willinghearted ones who have made such offer-

ings can be sure that Jehovah will not forget their hard work!—Hebrews 6:10.

The same applies to the share that each of us has in the Christian ministry. All are urged to buy out time to have a zealous share in preaching. (Matthew 24:14; Ephesians 5:15-17) Some do this as full-time evangelizers, or pioneers. Because of circumstances, others are not able to spend as much time in the ministry as a pioneer. Nevertheless, they too are pleasing to Jehovah. As with the tabernacle contributions, Jehovah does not specify a precise amount that each one should give. What he does require, though, is that each of us serve him with our whole heart, soul, mind, and strength. (Mark 12:30) If we are doing that, we can be sure that he will reward us for the voluntary offerings that we make to advance true worship.—Hebrews 11:6.



Balancing Work and Leisure

"LEISURE is a beautiful garment, but it will not do for constant wear." With these words an anonymous writer aptly illustrates the value of leisure. He shows, however, that it should be balanced with productive activity.

This matter was also addressed by the inspired Bible writer Solomon. This wise king identified two extremes to be avoided. First, he noted: "The stupid one is folding his hands and is eating his own flesh." (Ecclesiastes 4:5) Yes, sluggishness can bring one into poverty. As a consequence, it can endanger the lazy one's health, even his life. On the other hand, there are some who sacrifice everything on the altar of hard work. Solomon described their ceaseless toiling as "vanity and a striving after the wind."—Ecclesiastes 4:4.

With good reason, Solomon recommended a balance: "Better is a handful of rest than a double handful of hard work and striving after the wind." (Ecclesiastes 4:6) A person should "see good because of his hard work"—that is, he should periodically take time to enjoy what he has earned. (Ecclesiastes 2:24) And there should be other things in life besides secular work. Our family deserves some of our time. Solomon stressed that our primary obligation is, not secular work, but service to God. (Ecclesiastes 12:13) Are you among those who enjoy a balanced view of work?