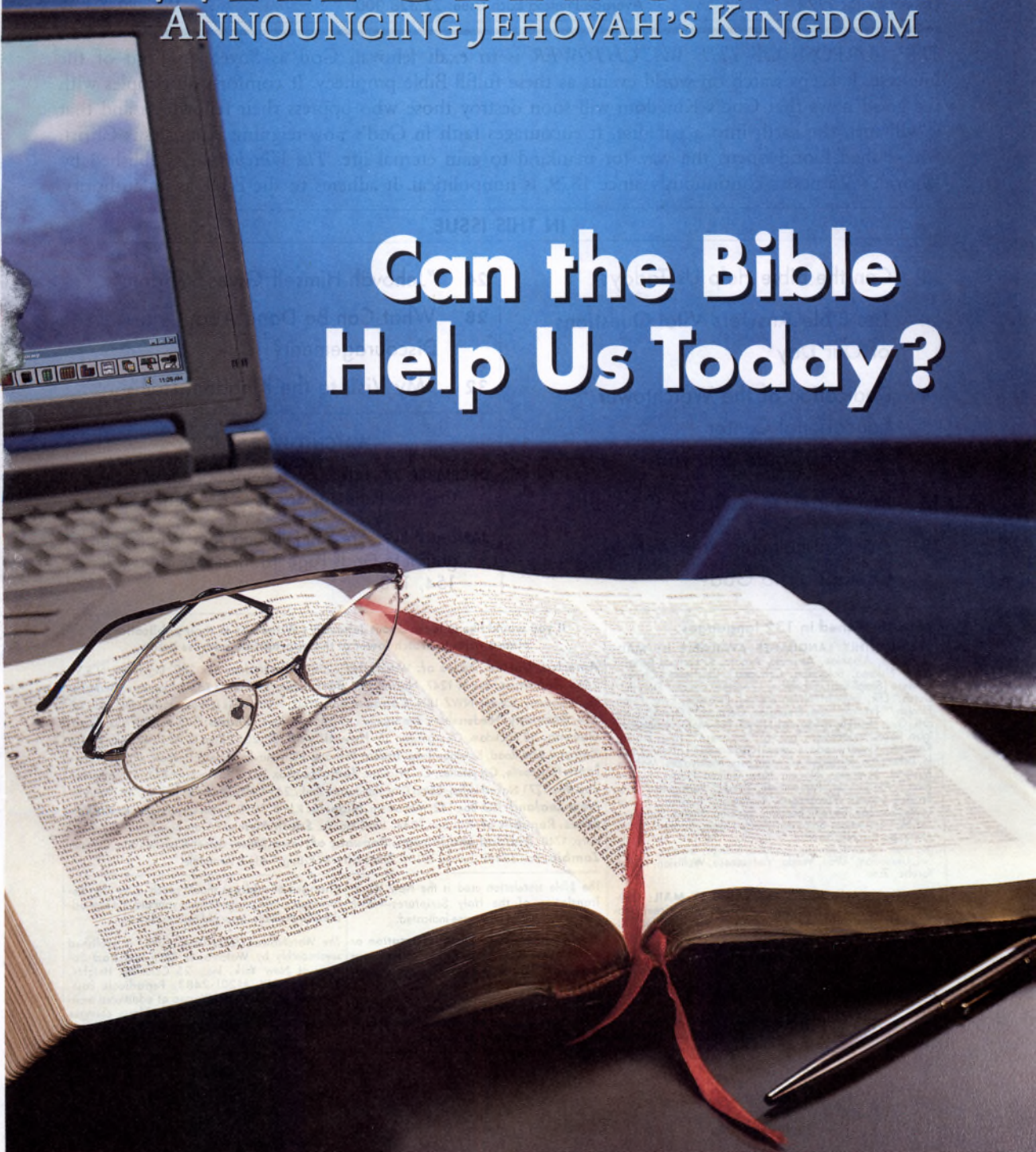


NOVEMBER 15, 1999

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Can the Bible Help Us Today?



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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Can the Bible Help Us Today?

"TAKING the Bible as a whole, about 1 percent is worth reading, but the rest is irrelevant and out-of-date."

So said one young man. Many would agree with him. Though the Bible continues to be a best-seller worldwide, millions pay scant attention to it and are unfamiliar with its teachings.

In its 1996 Christmas edition, the German newspaper *Süddeutsche Zeitung* commented that the Bible "has fewer and fewer readers. In the age of the natural sciences and increasing secularization, Biblical accounts appear to many to be strange and difficult to understand." Surveys confirm this report. Some studies reveal that a large number of children do not even know exactly who Jesus is. In one survey, fewer than half of the people interviewed could relate the Biblical stories of the prodigal son and the neighborly Samaritan.

The Swiss Evangelical Church publication

Reformiertes Forum states that in Switzerland demand for the Bible is not what it used to be.

Even among those who have a copy of the Bible, it often just collects dust on the shelf. In Britain the situation is no different. According to one survey, although most people have a Bible, the vast majority hardly ever read it.

On the other hand, millions worldwide feel differently about the Bible. They view it as God's Word and consider it valuable and beneficial. Hence, they read it regularly. One young woman wrote: "I try to read one or two chapters of the Bible each day. I enjoy it very much." Such individuals take careful note of what the Bible teaches, and they try to apply its counsel in their lives. They believe that the Bible can help them in today's troubled world.

What is your opinion? Is the Bible irrelevant in modern times? Or is it valuable and beneficial? Can the Bible help us today?



The Bible Answers Vital Questions of Our Day

IS THE Bible relevant today? For the answer to be yes, surely this age-old book would have to offer its readers guidance on topics of current interest and relevance. Does the Bible provide beneficial counsel on subjects that are of real importance in today's world?

Let us take a look at two current issues. In doing so, we will examine what the Bible says about these matters.

Why Does God Allow Suffering?

In view of the conditions in the world today, one of the most commonly asked questions is: Why does God allow innocent people to suffer? This question is justified, since more and more people are being affected by violent crime, corruption, genocide, personal tragedy, and so forth.

For example, in June 1998 an express train crashed into a bridge in northern Germany, killing more than a hundred passengers. Even experienced medics and firemen who attended to the injured and the dead were upset by the carnage. A bishop of the Evangelical Church asked: "Dear God, Why did this have to happen?" The bishop himself gave no answer.

Experience shows that when innocent people suffer evil without getting an explanation about the cause, they sometimes become embittered. Here is where the Bible can help, for it explains why innocent people are subjected to wickedness and suffering.

When Jehovah God created the earth and everything on it, he did not intend that mankind be troubled by wickedness and suffering. How can we be sure? Because upon completing

his creation, "God saw everything he had made and, look! it was very good." (Genesis 1:31) Ask yourself, 'If I were to observe something wicked, would I pronounce it "very good"?' Of course not! In the same way, when God pronounced everything "very good," there was no trace of wickedness on earth. So when and how did wickedness start?

Shortly after the creation of our first parents, Adam and Eve, a powerful spirit creature approached the woman and challenged Jehovah's truthfulness and the rightfulness of his sovereignty. (Genesis 3:1-5) This creature, Satan the Devil, later alleged that humans would not stay loyal to God under adversity. (Job 2:1-5) How did Jehovah react to this situation? He allowed for the passing of time so that it would become evident that humans cannot successfully direct their steps independent of him. (Jeremiah 10:23) When creatures act contrary to God's laws and principles, the result is sin, which produces injurious conditions. (Ecclesiastes 8:9; 1 John 3:4) Despite these adverse circumstances, however, Jehovah knew that some humans would maintain integrity to him.

Since that woeful rebellion in Eden, some 6,000 years have elapsed. Is that too long? Jehovah could have destroyed Satan and his supporters centuries ago. But has it not been better to wait until every conceivable doubt about the rightness of Jehovah's sovereignty and the integrity of humans to him is dispelled? Is it not true of present judicial systems that a court case to prove who is right and who is wrong may take years?

In view of the importance of the issues facing Jehovah and mankind—universal sovereignty and the integrity of humans—how wise it was of God to allow for time to pass! Now we see clearly what happens when humans ignore God's laws and take charge of their own af-

fairs. The result is widespread evil. And that is why so many innocent people suffer today.

Happily, though, God's Word indicates that wickedness will not last forever. In fact, Jehovah will soon put an end to evil and to those who cause it. "As regards the wicked," says Proverbs 2:22, "they will be cut off from the very earth; and as for the treacherous, they will be torn away from it." On the other hand, those faithful to God can look forward to a time, now near at hand, when "death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be any more."—Revelation 21:4.

So, then, the Bible clearly explains why the innocent suffer. It also assures us that evil and suffering will soon end. As we experience life's present hardships, however, we need the answer to another vital question.

What Is the Purpose of Life?

Perhaps now more than at any other time in mankind's history, people are trying to find out what life is all about. Many ask themselves, 'Why am I living? How can I find meaning in my life?' Various circumstances prompt them to raise these questions.

An individual's life may be shattered by a personal tragedy. For instance, early in 1998 a 12-year-old girl living in Bavaria, Germany, was kidnapped and murdered. One year later, her mother admitted that she spends each day searching for a purpose in life—to no avail. Some young people are moved to wonder about the meaning of life. They search for security, fulfillment, and a sense of belonging, only to despair at the widespread hypocrisy and corruption. Other individuals build their lives around a career, but they discover that power, prestige, and possessions fail to satisfy the inner yearning to find a reason for their existence.



Do you know why God allows the innocent to suffer?

Whatever moves a person to inquire about the purpose of life, this question warrants a serious and satisfying answer. Once again, the Bible can be of great benefit. It identifies Jehovah as a God of purpose, one who has sound reasons for everything he does. We ask, Would you construct a house without having a reason? Likely not, since building a house requires a huge investment of money and can take months or years. You build a house so that you or someone else can live in it. The same logic can be applied to Jehovah. He did not go to all the trouble of creating the earth and the living things upon it without having a reason, a purpose. (Compare Hebrews 3:4.) What is his purpose for the earth?

The prophecy of Isaiah identifies Jehovah as "the true God, the Former of the earth and the Maker of it." Indeed, he is "the One who firmly established [the earth], who did not create it simply for nothing, who formed it even to be inhabited." (Isaiah 45:18) Yes, ever since the

earth was created, it has been Jehovah's purpose to have it inhabited. Says Psalm 115:16: "As regards the heavens, to Jehovah the heavens belong, but the earth he has given to the sons of men." Thus the Bible shows that Jehovah created the earth to be inhabited by obedient humans, who would take care of it.—Genesis 1:27, 28.

Did the rebellion of Adam and Eve cause Jehovah to change his purpose? No. How can we be so sure? Well, consider this point: The Bible was written thousands of years after the rebellion in Eden. If God had abandoned his original purpose, why is that not mentioned in the Bible? The obvious conclusion is that his purpose for the earth and mankind remains unchanged.

Moreover, Jehovah's purpose never fails. Through Isaiah, God provides this assurance: "Just as the pouring rain descends, and the snow, from the heavens and does not return to that place, unless it actually saturates the earth and makes it produce and sprout, and seed is



You can enjoy a purposeful life

paradise earth, in which we will never cease to learn new things about God and his wonderful creation. (Luke 23: 43) What a thrilling prospect!

Many who search for a purpose in life turn to the Bible and find great happiness right now. For instance, a young man named Alfred could find no meaning in life. The involvement of religion in war disgusted him, and he was upset at the hypocrisy and corruption in politics. Alfred visited Indians of North America in the hope of gaining enlightenment about life's purpose, only to return to Europe disappointed. In despair, he turned to drugs and wild music. However, a regular and careful examination of the Bible later helped Alfred to recognize the true purpose of life and to find contentment.

actually given to the sower and bread to the eater, so my word that goes forth from my mouth will prove to be. It will not return to me without results, but it will certainly do that in which I have delighted, and it will have certain success in that for which I have sent it."—Isaiah 55:10, 11.

What God Expects of Us

Clearly, then, we can have confidence in the fulfillment of God's purpose to have the earth inhabited forever by obedient humans. If we are to be among those privileged to live permanently on earth, we must do what wise King Solomon said: "Fear the true God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole obligation of man."—Ecclesiastes 12:13; John 17:3.

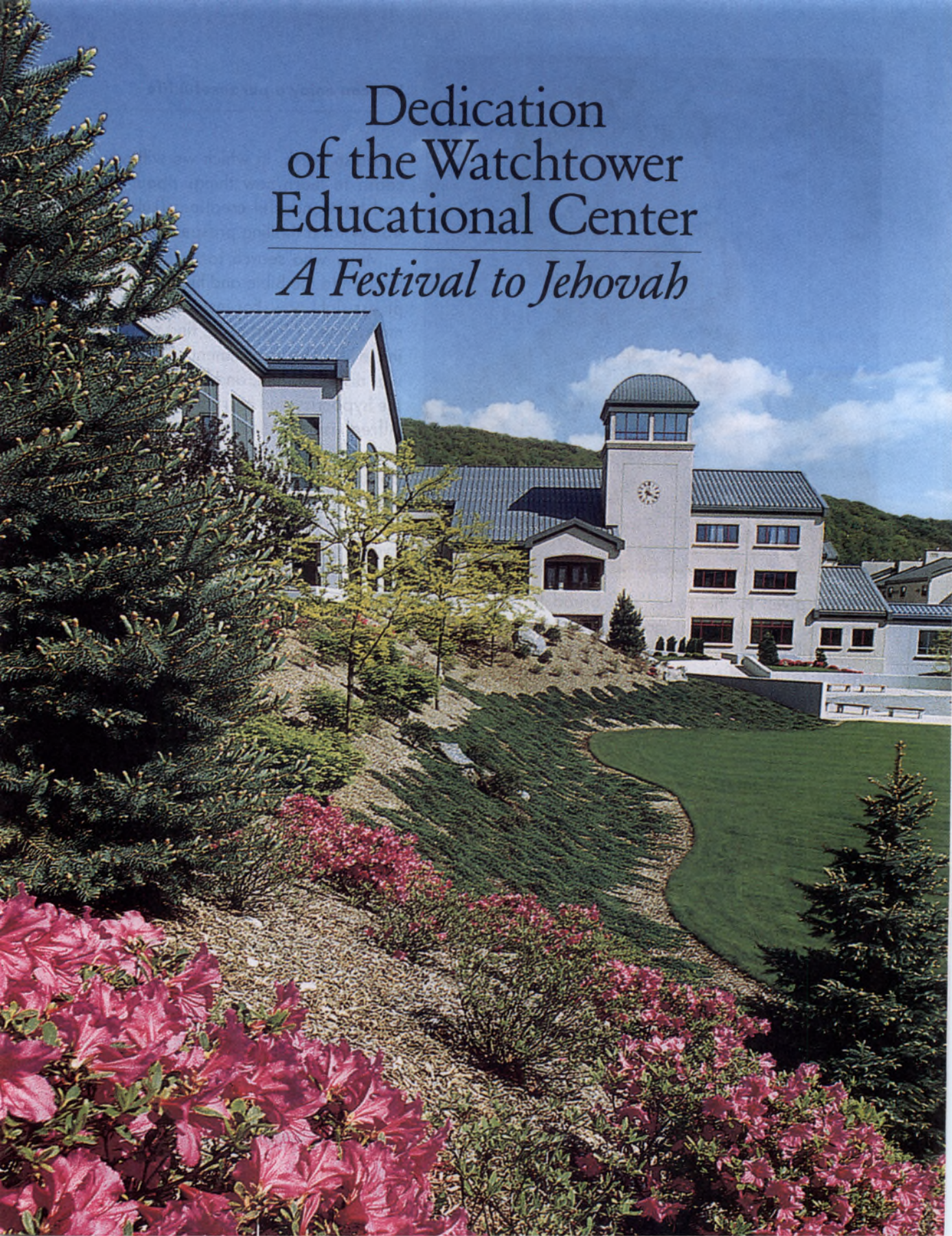
Living in harmony with Jehovah's purpose for mankind means getting to know the true God and conforming to his requirements as set out in the Holy Scriptures. If we do this now, we can entertain the hope of everlasting life on a

A Dependable Light to Our Roadway

What, then, can we conclude about the Bible? Is it relevant today? It is, indeed, because it offers guidance on current issues. The Bible explains that wickedness is not of God's making and helps us to find a satisfying purpose in life. Furthermore, the Bible has much to say on other matters that are of great interest today. Such topics as marriage, child rearing, human relations, and hope for the dead are dealt with in God's Word.

If you have not done so already, please take a close look at the contents of the Bible. Once you discover the true value of its guidelines for life, you may well feel as did the psalmist who looked to Jehovah God for guidance and sang: "Your word is a lamp to my foot, and a light to my roadway."—Psalm 119:105.

Dedication
of the Watchtower
Educational Center
A Festival to Jehovah



SINCE ancient times, joyous festivals have been part of true worship. Some of the festivals held in ancient Israel lasted for days and were attended by many thousands of Jehovah's worshipers. The inauguration of Solomon's temple lasted seven days and was followed by the week-long Festival of Booths. This provided the Israelites with an opportunity to reflect on the marvelous way that Jehovah had dealt with them. They returned home "rejoicing and feeling merry of heart over all the goodness that Jehovah had performed."—1 Kings 8:66.

What took place at the Watchtower Educational Center in Patterson, New York, U.S.A., on May 17-22, 1999, reminded the visitors of those ancient happy festivals. This was a week of special activity centering on the dedication of a 28-building complex that is designed to promote global Bible education. Provisions were made for all 5,400 members of the headquarters staff at Brooklyn, Wallkill, and Patterson to take comprehensive tours of the Patterson facilities during that memorable week. Among the guests were over 500 former staff members who had shared in the work during the construction of the educational center, representatives from 23 branches of the Watch Tower Society, and others from nearby congregations—a total of at least 8,100.

Tour Displays Provide an Education

Special displays, educational video presentations, and self-guided tours were arranged to acquaint the visitors with the educational center. In the main lobby, visitors were immediately attracted to a scale model of the temple that existed in Jerusalem during the time of Jesus' earthly ministry. Other displays highlighted the early history of the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead, historic conventions, congregation

meetings, the modern-day development of home Bible studies—millions of which are now conducted each week—and the work done by the Legal Department to keep the way open for such activity in obedience to Jesus' command.—Matthew 28:19, 20.

In the adjacent auditorium, which seats 1,700 comfortably, those visiting during the dedication festivities were treated to a 33-minute video presentation entitled "Not by Power—By My Spirit!" This video showed how the Watchtower Educational Center came about. Interviews disclosed incidents clearly indicating Jehovah's direction in matters and his blessing on efforts to bring this 15-year project to a successful conclusion. Thousands shared in the actual construction work. At one point in 1994, there were 526 workers on site, including 350 full-time volunteers, 113 temporary workers, and 63 who commuted each day to lend a hand. Many more supported the work with donations. All of them realize that this would never have been possible without Jehovah's spirit.—Zechariah 4:6.

Those who took the tours could see that the focus of the work being done at the educational center is the promoting of divine teaching. The display at the entrance to Gilead School on the first floor of the school building highlighted the rich spiritual heritage and history of the school. Since its first class in 1943 at the school's original campus in South Lansing, New York, Gilead School has trained over 7,000 students for missionary service. Displays on the second floor of the school building provided views of the School for Branch Committee Members and the School for Traveling Overseers, both of which hold classes there. Since its beginning in November of 1995, the branch school has provided advanced instruction for 360 Branch Committee members from 106 lands.

*A packed auditorium
and an overflow
audience in the
dining room*



*The tours were
an especially joyous
feature*



As visitors toured, they quickly realized that in most areas, they were able to see more than a display of pictures. They were able to go right into the various departments, visit the offices and other work places, and get an in-depth view of the work being done. A highlight of the tour was the Audio/Video Services building. What excellent facilities are there being used to promote Bible education! Through a series of informative displays and short videos, visitors were helped to understand how voice recordings are made and how videos are prepared. They learned something about the extensive research that goes into the preparation of props and costumes. They saw how stage sets were assembled with minimal cost but with remarkable attention to detail. They witnessed how music is used to make people feel that they are actually in the scene that they are viewing. Since 1990 the Society has produced ten videos in 41 languages, highlighting a variety of Bible themes, in addition to other videos for those who use American Sign Language.

Many who took the tour went to the Photo Lab, the Art Department, Information Services, which provides computer training and support, the Service Department, which supervises the activity of 11,242 congregations and 572 traveling overseers, and Writing Correspondence, where some 14,000 inquiries are handled each year. They were impressed with the research behind the letters that are sent out and the genuine concern shown for those whose inquiries give evidence that they are trying to cope with serious problems.

A constant stream of those on tour visited Translation Services. They were surprised to learn that during the past five years, 102 more languages were added to the number in which the Society provides

Bible literature. Worldwide, some 80 percent of Jehovah's Witnesses read the Society's publications in languages other than English. To provide for their needs, there are over 1,700 volunteers working in the translation field in 100 countries. Displays showed *The Watchtower* in the languages of the Americas, Europe, Asia, and Africa. Visitors could see the *New World Translation* of the Bible in the 31 languages in which it has been published. They learned that Watch Tower publications are now available in 332 languages and that the brochure *What Does God Require of Us?* has been published in 219 of these.

Visitors to the Legal Department were shown the diverse fields of activity that require legal attention worldwide. In a video, they saw an actual court hearing in which a Witness attorney was arguing a case involving blood transfusion. They also learned what is being done to keep the way open for public preaching of the good news. (Philippians 1:7) Attention was drawn to the decision in March of this year, by a federal district court, directing the borough of Oradell, New Jersey, U.S.A., to change its laws so as to remove permit and badge requirements for Jehovah's Witnesses who want to share in their public ministry from house to house in that community.

This was by no means all that the visitors saw. They examined construction displays in the Precast Shop and toured Wastewater Treatment facilities, the Powerhouse, the Water-Softening Facility, and the numerous maintenance shops, among others. It was the chance of a lifetime.

Dedication Program Emphasizes Divine Education

The actual dedication program was held on Wednesday, May 19, beginning at 4:00 p.m. The joyous crowd of 6,929

included members of the headquarters staff, Society guests, and 372 assembled at the Canada branch, which was tied in electronically.

The audience was pleased indeed to hear heartwarming words of welcome by Milton G. Henschel, the president of the Watch Tower Society. Theodore Jaracz, a member of the Governing Body and chairman for the occasion, next introduced William Malenfant. In presenting "Highlights of the Building Program," he interviewed three brothers who had important roles in the development, design, and construction of the Watchtower Educational Center. In the course of the interviews, it was stated that during the years of the actual building work, over 8,700 temporary workers had come at their own expense to work on the project. What fine testimony to the unity and generosity made possible by divine teaching!

Next came a symposium entitled "Divine Education on a Global Scale." It was presented by four Governing Body members. John E. Barr stressed that divine education finds its basis in God's Word, the Bible, which encourages Christians to "go on bearing fruit in every good work and increasing in the accurate knowledge of God." (Colossians 1:10) Daniel Sydlik discussed how divine education is organized theocratically from the head of the Christian congregation, Jesus Christ, on down to every member of the worldwide brotherhood. (1 Corinthians 12:12-27) The final two parts of the symposium, developed by Gerrit Lösch and Carey Barber, showed how divine education qualifies ministers to reach people everywhere and instruct them so that they too may walk in God's way.—Isaiah 2:1-4; 2 Corinthians 3:5.

To acquaint the audience with the various schools that function at this edu-

cational center, interviews and discussions were conducted with the instructors as well as others involved in their operation. The role of each school in carrying out the divine educational program on a global scale was shown. It was pointed out that Gilead School focuses on a study of each book of the Bible, on the modern-day history of Jehovah's people, and on preparation for missionary service. The branch school is a marvelously comprehensive study of the numerous fields of activity in which Branch Committee members are involved. The School for Traveling Overseers is designed not only to fill the needs of the traveling brothers but also to equip them to provide the sort of spiritual help that will especially benefit the congregations.

To conclude the fine program, Lloyd Barry of the Governing Body delivered the dedication talk on the subject "Building With Our Grand Creator." He pointed out that the Creator, Jehovah, takes delight in all of his creations and invites us to rejoice with him. (Isaiah 65:18) Since "he that constructed all things is God," to Jehovah God goes the ultimate credit for all of this construction. (Hebrews 3:4) Having expressed such thoughts, the speaker said a heartfelt prayer, dedicating the Watchtower Educational Center to Jehovah, our Grand Creator.*

There is no doubt that the entire week's festivities will long be remembered by those who attended. Why not arrange to visit the Watchtower Educational Center? We are sure that visiting and touring it will be an encouragement to you in your efforts to learn more about our loving Creator and to live by his righteous standards.

* Brother Barry finished his earthly course in faithfulness on July 2, 1999. See *The Watchtower*, October 1, 1999, page 16.

REMEMBER YOUR GRAND CREATOR!

“Remember, now, your Grand Creator . . . before the calamitous days proceed to come.”—ECCLESIASTES 12:1.

JEHOVAH gives his servants strength to do his will. (Isaiah 40:28-31) This is true regardless of their age. But young people dedicated to God should especially want to use their youth and strength wisely. Therefore, they take to heart the counsel of “the congregator,” King Solomon of ancient Israel. He urged: “Remember, now, your Grand Creator in the days of your young manhood, before the calamitous days proceed to come, or the years have arrived when you will say: ‘I have no delight in them.’”—Ecclesiastes 1:1; 12:1.

² Solomon’s admonition about remembering the Grand Creator during youth was first directed to young men and women of Israel. They were born into a nation dedicated to Jehovah. What about the children of dedicated Christians today? Surely, they should bear their Grand Creator in mind. If they do so, they will honor him and will benefit themselves.—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

Fine Examples From the Past

³ Many young people of Bible record set fine examples as those who remembered their Grand Creator. From early life onward, Jacob’s son Joseph remembered his

Creator. When Potiphar’s wife tempted Joseph to engage in sexual immorality with her, he firmly refused and stated: “How could I commit this great badness and actually sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) The Levite Samuel remembered his Creator not only in his childhood but throughout his life. (1 Samuel 1:22-28; 2:18; 3:1-5) Youthful David of Bethlehem certainly kept his Creator in mind. His trust in God was evident when he faced the Philistine giant Goliath and declared: “You are coming to me with a sword and with a spear and with a javelin, but I am coming to you with the name of Jehovah of armies, the God of the battle lines of Israel, whom you have taunted. This day Jehovah will surrender you into my hand, and I shall certainly strike you down and remove your head off you; . . . and people of all the earth will know that there exists a God belonging to Israel. And all this congregation will know that neither with sword nor with spear does Jehovah save, because to Jehovah belongs the battle, and he must give you men into our hand.” Soon, Goliath was dead, and the Philistines took to flight.—1 Samuel 17:45-51.

⁴ Another young person who remembered the Grand Creator was a captive Israelite girl. She gave such a fine witness to the

1. How should young people dedicated to God want to use their youth and strength?
2. What should children of dedicated Christians do?
3. What examples were set by Joseph, Samuel, and David?

4. (a) What shows that our Grand Creator was remembered by a captive Israelite girl in Syria and by young King Josiah? (b) How did 12-year-old Jesus show that he remembered his Creator?

wife of Syrian army chief Naaman that he went to God's prophet, was cured of leprosy, and became a worshiper of Jehovah. (2 Kings 5:1-19) Young King Josiah courageously promoted the pure worship of Jehovah. (2 Kings 22:1-23:25) But the finest example of one who remembered his Grand Creator while still of tender age was Jesus of Nazareth. Consider what happened when he was 12 years old. His parents took him to Jerusalem for the Passover. On the return trip, they noted that Jesus was missing; so they turned back to search for him. On the third day, they found him discussing Scriptural questions with teachers at the temple. Responding to his mother's anxious inquiry, Jesus asked: "Why did you have to go looking for me? Did you not know that I must be in the house of my Father?" (Luke 2:49) It was beneficial for Jesus to obtain information of spiritual value at the temple, 'the house of his Father.' Today, the Kingdom Hall of Jehovah's Witnesses is an excellent place to acquire accurate knowledge of our Grand Creator.

Remember Jehovah Now!

⁵ The wholehearted worshiper of Jehovah desires to take up His service as soon as possible and to serve God the rest of his days. However, what are the prospects of a person whose youth is spent in vain because of not remembering the Creator? Under divine inspiration the congregator says: "Remember, now, your Grand Creator in the days of your young manhood, before the calamitous days proceed to come, or the years have arrived when you will say: 'I have no delight in them.'"—Ecclesiastes 12:1.

⁶ No one delights in "the calamitous days"

5. In your own words, how would you express what the congregator said as recorded at Ecclesiastes 12:1?

6. What evidence is there that aged Simeon and Anna remembered their Grand Creator?

of old age. But the elderly who keep God in mind are joyful. For instance, aged Simeon took the infant Jesus into his arms at the temple and joyously declared: "Now, Sovereign Lord, you are letting your slave go free in peace according to your declaration; because my eyes have seen your means of saving that you have made ready in the sight of all the peoples, a light for removing the veil from the nations and a glory of your people Israel." (Luke 2:25-32) ~~Eighty-four-year-old~~ Anna also remembered her Creator. She was always at the temple and was present when the infant Jesus was taken there. "In that very hour she came near and began returning thanks to God and speaking about the child to all those waiting for Jerusalem's deliverance."—Luke 2:36-38.

⁷ Present-day Witnesses of Jehovah who have grown old in God's service may suffer the pains and limitations of advanced age. Yet, how happy they are, and how much we appreciate their faithful service! They have "the joy of Jehovah," for they know that he has assumed his invincible power toward this earth and has installed Jesus Christ as a powerful heavenly King. (Nehemiah 8:10) Now is the time for young and old to heed the exhortation: "You young men and also you virgins, you old men together with boys. Let them praise the name of Jehovah, for his name alone is unreachably high. His dignity is above earth and heaven."—Psalm 148:12, 13.

⁸ "The calamitous days" of old age are unrewarding—perhaps very distressing—to those who give no thought to their Grand Creator and who have no understanding of his glorious purposes. They have no spiri-

7. What is the situation of those who have grown old in God's service?

8, 9. (a) For whom are "the calamitous days" unrewarding, and why is that the case? (b) How would you explain Ecclesiastes 12:2?



David, the captive Israelite girl, Anna, and Simeon remembered Jehovah

tual comprehension that can counterbalance the trials of old age and the woes that have beset mankind since Satan was cast out of heaven. (Revelation 12:7-12) Hence, the congregator urges us to remember our Creator “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds have returned, afterward the downpour.” (Ecclesiastes 12:2) What is the significance of these words?

⁹ Solomon likens the time of youth to the Palestinian summer when sun, moon, and stars shed their light from a cloudless sky. Things then look very bright. In old age, however, a person’s days are like the cold, rainy season of winter, with one downpour of trouble after another. (Job 14:1) How sad it would be to know about the Creator but fail to serve him in the summertime of life! In life’s wintertime of old age, things darken, especially for those who have passed up opportunities to serve Jehovah in their youth because of involvement in vain pursuits. Regardless of our age, however, let us ‘follow Jehovah fully,’ as did faithful Caleb, a loyal associate of the prophet Moses. —Joshua 14:6-9.

Effects of Advancing Age

¹⁰ Solomon next points to difficulties “in the day when the keepers of the house tremble, and the men of vital energy have

dark.” (Ecclesiastes 12:3) The “house” denotes the human body. (Matthew 12:43-45; 2 Corinthians 5:1-8) Its “keepers” are the arms and hands, which protect the body and supply its needs. In old age they often tremble with weakness, nervousness, and palsy. “The men of vital energy”—the legs—no longer are sturdy pillars but have weakened and bend so that the feet merely shuffle along. Yet, are you not happy to see elderly fellow believers at Christian meetings?

¹¹ “The grinding women have quit working because they have become few”—but how? The teeth may have decayed or been lost, with few if any left. Grinding solid food is difficult or ceases altogether. “The ladies seeing at the windows”—the eyes coupled with the mental faculties by which we see—become dim, if not completely dark.

¹² “And,” continues the congregator, “the doors onto the street have been closed, when the sound of the grinding mill becomes low, and one gets up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song sound low.” (Ecclesiastes 12:4) The two doors of the mouth—the lips—no longer open much or at all to express what is in the “house,” or body, of those of advanced age who do not serve God. Nothing is sent forth on “the street”

11. Figuratively speaking, who are “the grinding women” and “the ladies seeing at the windows”?

12. (a) How is it that “the doors onto the street have been closed”? (b) What do you think about elderly Kingdom proclaimers?

10. What is represented by (a) “the keepers of the house”? (b) “the men of vital energy”?



Elderly Witnesses of Jehovah joyfully render sacred service to our Grand Creator



of public life. Yet, what about zealous elderly Kingdom proclaimers? (Job 41:14) They may walk slowly from house to house and some may speak with difficulty, but they surely praise Jah! —Psalm 113:1.

¹³ The sound of the grinding mill becomes low as food is chewed with toothless gums. On his bed an old man does not sleep soundly. Even the chirping of a bird disturbs him. Few are the songs that he sings, and his rendering of any melody is feeble. “All the daughters of song”—the melodic notes—“sound low.” The elderly one’s hearing of music and song produced by others is poor. However, older anointed ones and their companions, some of whom also are not so young, keep on raising their voices in songs of praise to God at Christian meetings. How glad we are to have them at our

13. How does the congregator describe other problems of the elderly, but what is true of older Christians?

side, extolling Jehovah in the congregation! —Psalm 149:1.

¹⁴ How sad the lot of oldsters, especially those who have ignored the Creator!

Says the congregator: “Also, they have become afraid merely at what is high, and there are terrors in the way. And the almond tree carries blossoms, and the grasshopper drags itself along, and the caper berry bursts, because man is walking to his long-lasting house and the wailers have marched around in the street.” (Ecclesiastes 12:5) At the top of a high staircase, many of the aged are fearful of fall-

ing. Even looking up at something high may make them dizzy. When they must go out into crowded streets, they are struck with terror at the thought of injury or assault by thieves.

¹⁵ In the case of an old man, “the almond tree carries blossoms,” apparently indicating that his hair turns gray, then snow-white. The hoary hairs fall like the white blossoms of the almond tree. As he ‘drags himself along,’ perhaps bent over with arms hanging down or hands resting on his hips with the elbows crooked upward, he resembles a grasshopper. If any of us look a little like that, though, let others take note that we are in Jehovah’s energetic, speedy locust army!—See *The Watchtower*, May 1, 1998, pages 8-13.

14. What fears plague the aged?

15. How is it that “the almond tree carries blossoms,” and how does the grasshopper ‘drag itself along’?

¹⁶ The elderly person's appetite is no longer keen, even if the food before him is as tasty as the caper berry. These berries have long been used to stimulate appetite. 'The bursting of the caper berry' suggests that when an old man's appetite diminishes, even this fruit fails to awaken his desire for food. Such things indicate that he is nearing "his long-lasting house," the grave. It will be his home forever if he has failed to bear his Creator in mind and has pursued such a wicked course that God does not remember him in the resurrection. Signs of approaching death are evident from the mournful tones and groans of complaint issuing forth from the doors of the oldster's mouth.

¹⁷ We are urged to remember our Creator "before the silver cord is removed, and the golden bowl gets crushed, and the jar at the spring is broken, and the waterwheel for the cistern has been crushed." (Ecclesiastes 12:6) The "silver cord" may be the spinal cord. Death is certain when this marvelous pathway of impulses to the brain is irreparably damaged. The "golden bowl" may denote the brain, contained in the bowl-like cranium, to which the spinal cord is attached. Golden for preciousness, the brain when broken down spells death.

¹⁸ "The jar at the spring" is the heart, which receives the stream of blood and sends it out again for circulation through the body. At death, the heart becomes like a broken jar, shattered at the spring because it can no longer receive, contain, and pump out the blood vital for the body's nourishment and refreshment. The 'crushed water-

wheel for the cistern' ceases to turn, ending circulation of life-sustaining blood. Jehovah thus revealed the circulation of blood to Solomon long before 17th-century physician William Harvey demonstrated that it circulates.

¹⁹ The congregator added: "Then the dust returns to the earth just as it happened to be and the spirit itself returns to the true God who gave it." (Ecclesiastes 12:7) With the "waterwheel" crushed, the human body, originally made out of dust from the ground, returns to the dust. (Genesis 2:7; 3:19) The soul dies because the spirit, or life-force, given by God returns to and resides with our Creator.—Ezekiel 18:4, 20; James 2:26.

What Future for Those Who Remember?

²⁰ Solomon very effectively showed how important it is to remember our Grand Creator. Surely, a comparatively short and troubled life is not all there is for those who keep Jehovah in mind and wholeheartedly do his will. Whether they are young or old, they have the same attitude as that of Moses, who prayed: "Show us just how

19. How do the words of Ecclesiastes 12:7 apply at death?

20. What was Moses requesting when he prayed as recorded at Psalm 90:12?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ Why are young people urged to remember their Creator?
- ☐ What are some Scriptural examples of those who remembered their Grand Creator?
- ☐ What are some effects of old age described by Solomon?
- ☐ What future is there for those who bear Jehovah in mind?

16. (a) What is suggested by 'the bursting of the caper berry'? (b) What is man's "long-lasting house," and what signs of approaching death become evident?

17. How is "the silver cord" removed, and what may "the golden bowl" represent?

18. What is the figurative "jar at the spring," and what happens when it is broken?

to count our days in such a way that we may bring a heart of wisdom in.” God’s humble prophet earnestly desired that Jehovah show, or teach, him and the people of Israel to exercise wisdom in valuing ‘the days of their years’ and using them in a God-approved manner.—Psalm 90:10, 12.

²¹ Especially should Christian youths be

21. If we are to count our days to Jehovah’s glory, what must we do?

determined to heed the congregator’s counsel to bear the Creator in mind. What splendid opportunities they have to render sacred service to God! Regardless of our age, however, if we learn to count our days to Jehovah’s glory in this “time of the end,” we may be able to keep right on counting them forever. (Daniel 12:4; John 17:3) To do so, of course, we must remember our Grand Creator. We must also fulfill our whole obligation to God.

ARE YOU FULFILLING YOUR WHOLE OBLIGATION TO GOD?

“The true God himself will bring every sort of work into the judgment in relation to every hidden thing, as to whether it is good or bad.”—ECCLESIASTES 12:14.

JEHOVAH supports those who keep remembering him as their Grand Creator. His inspired Word gives them the knowledge needed to be fully pleasing to him. God’s holy spirit guides them in doing the divine will and in “bearing fruit in every good work.” (Colossians 1:9, 10) Moreover, Jehovah provides spiritual food and theocratic direction through “the faithful and discreet slave.” (Matthew 24:45-47) In many ways, then, God’s people have heaven’s blessing as they serve Jehovah and carry out the vital work of preaching the good news of the Kingdom.—Mark 13:10.

1. What provisions has Jehovah made for his people?

² True Christians are happy to be occupied in sacred service to Jehovah. Yet, some may get discouraged and think that their efforts are meaningless. At times, for instance, dedicated Christians may wonder if their conscientious efforts are really worthwhile. When reflecting on family study and other activities, questions like these may well arise in the mind of a family head: ‘Is Jehovah really pleased with what we are doing? Are we fulfilling our whole obligation to God?’ The congregator’s wise words can help to answer such questions.

2. Regarding service to Jehovah, what questions may arise?

Is Everything Vanity?

³ Some may think that the wise man's words are not very encouraging to anybody—young or old. "The greatest vanity!" said the congregator, 'Everything is vanity.'" (Ecclesiastes 12:8) Actually, it is the very height of vanity to ignore the Grand Creator in youth, to grow old without serving him, and to have only advanced age to show for a long life. All has been vanity, or emptiness, for such a person, even if he dies with wealth and fame in this world that is lying in the power of the wicked one, Satan the Devil.—1 John 5:19.

⁴ Not everything is vanity for those who lay up treasures in heaven as Jehovah's faithful servants. (Matthew 6:19, 20) They have plenty to do in the rewarding work of the Lord, and such labors definitely are not in vain. (1 Corinthians 15:58) But if we are dedicated Christians, are we keeping busy in God-assigned work in these last days? (2 Timothy 3:1) Or have we settled into a life-style that differs little from that of our neighbors in general? They may be associated with various religions and may be quite devout, attending their houses of worship regularly and trying to carry out what their form of worship requires of them. Of course, they are not proclaimers of the Kingdom message. They do not have accurate knowledge that this is "the time of the end" and have no sense of urgency about the days in which we are living.—Daniel 12:4.

⁵ Jesus Christ said of our critical times: "Just as the days of Noah were, so the presence of the Son of man will be. For as they were in those days before the flood, eat-

ing and drinking, men marrying and women being given in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark; and they took no note until the flood came and swept them all away, so the presence of the Son of man will be." (Matthew 24:37-39) In moderation, there is nothing wrong with eating and drinking, and marriage is an arrangement originated by God himself. (Genesis 2:20-24) Yet, if we realize that the normal pursuits of life have become our chief concern, why not make this a matter of prayer? Jehovah can help us to keep Kingdom interests first, do what is right, and fulfill our obligation to him.—Matthew 6:33; Romans 12:12; 2 Corinthians 13:7.

Dedication and Our Obligation to God

⁶ Some baptized Christians need to pray earnestly because they are not living up to the ministerial obligations they assumed when they made a dedication to God. Annually, well over 300,000 have been baptized for a number of years now, but the overall number of active Witnesses of Jehovah has not kept pace. Some who became Kingdom publishers have ceased to proclaim the good news. Yet, individuals must have a meaningful share in the Christian ministry before they are baptized. So they are aware of the commission Jesus gave to all his followers: "Go . . . and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Matthew 28:19, 20) Unless they have the most extraordinary limitations because of health or other factors beyond their control, baptized individuals who are no longer serving as active Witnesses of God and Christ are

⁶ In what important way are some baptized individuals failing to fulfill their obligation to God?

3. In keeping with Ecclesiastes 12:8, what is the very height of vanity?

4. Why can it be said that not everything is vanity?

5. If the normal pursuits of life have become our chief concern, what should we do?

not living up to their whole obligation before our Grand Creator.—Isaiah 43:10-12.

⁷ Ancient Israel was a nation dedicated to God, and under the Law covenant, its people had obligations before Jehovah. For instance, all males were to assemble for three annual festivals, and a man who deliberately did not keep the Passover was “cut off” in death. (Numbers 9:13; Leviticus 23:1-43; Deuteronomy 16:16) To fulfill their obligation to God as his dedicated people, the Israelites had to gather for worship. (Deuteronomy 31:10-13) Nothing in the Law said, ‘Do this if you can fit it into your life.’ For those now dedicated to Jehovah, surely this adds weight to Paul’s words: “Let us consider one another to incite to love and fine works, not forsaking the gathering of ourselves together, as some have the custom, but encouraging one another, and all the more so as you behold the day drawing near.” (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Yes, regularly assembling with fellow believers is part of a dedicated Christian’s obligation to God.

Weigh Your Decisions Carefully!

⁸ Perhaps you are a young person dedicated to Jehovah. Rich blessings will be yours if you keep Kingdom interests first in life. (Proverbs 10:22) With prayer and careful planning, you may be able to spend at least your younger years in some form of full-time service—a fine way to show that you remember your Grand Creator. Otherwise, material interests may begin to occupy most of your time and attention. Like people in general, you may marry early in life and go into debt to acquire material things. A lucrative career may absorb much of your time and energy. If you have children, you will have to shoulder family re-

7. Why should we meet together regularly for worship?

8. Why should a young dedicated person give prayerful consideration to his sacred service?



**Not everything
is vanity for those who serve Jehovah**

sponsibilities for decades. (1 Timothy 5:8) You may not have forgotten your Grand Creator, but it is wise to realize that your early planning, or lack of it, may set the course for your adult life. In later years, you may look back and wish that at least your young adulthood had been more fully spent in sacred service to our Grand Creator. Why not give your prospects prayerful thought right now, so that you will find satisfaction in your sacred service to Jehovah in your younger years?

⁹ Consider another set of circumstances—those of a man who once served as a shepherd of “the flock of God.” (1 Peter 5:2, 3) For some reason, he voluntarily relin-

9. What may be possible for one who has grown older and once shouldered heavy responsibility in the congregation?

quished such privileges. True, he has grown older now, and it may be more difficult for him to carry on in God's service. But could it be that he should again reach out for theocratic privileges? What blessings such a man might bring to others if he is able to shoulder more responsibility in the congregation! And since no one lives with regard to himself only, friends and loved ones will rejoice if he is able to increase his service, to God's glory. (Romans 14:7, 8) Most of all, Jehovah will not forget what anyone does in his service. (Hebrews 6:10-12) So, what can help us to remember our Grand Creator?

Aids to Remembering Our Grand Creator

¹⁰ The congregator was in an excellent position to provide guidelines for our remembering our Grand Creator. Jehovah had answered his heartfelt prayers by granting him extraordinary wisdom. (1 Kings 3:6-12) Solomon made a thorough investigation of the entire scope of human affairs. Moreover, he was divinely inspired to commit his findings to writing so as to benefit others. He wrote: "And besides the fact that the congregator had become wise, he also taught the people knowledge continually, and he pondered and made a thorough search, that he might arrange many proverbs in order. The congregator sought to find the delightful words and the writing of correct words of truth."—Ecclesiastes 12:9, 10.

¹¹ The Greek *Septuagint* rendering of these words reads: "And moreover, because the preacher was wise, because he taught mankind wisdom; that the ear might find what is comely from parables, the preacher made diligent search to find pleasing

words and a writing of rectitude—words of truth." (*The Septuagint Bible*, translated by Charles Thomson) Solomon endeavored to reach the hearts of his readers with delightful words and truly interesting and worthwhile subjects. Since his words found in the Scriptures are the product of inspiration by holy spirit, we can without reservation accept his findings and wise counsel. —2 Timothy 3:16, 17.

¹² Even in the absence of modern printing methods, there were plenty of books available in Solomon's day. How was such literature to be viewed? He said: "The words of the wise ones are like oxgoads, and just like nails driven in are those indulging in collections of sentences; they have been given from one shepherd. As regards anything besides these, my son, take a warning: To the making of many books there is no end, and much devotion to them is wearisome to the flesh."—Ecclesiastes 12:11, 12.

¹³ The words of those possessing godly wisdom prove to be like oxgoads. How so? They prod the readers or listeners to make advancement in harmony with the wise words read or heard. Moreover, those who occupy themselves with "collections of sentences," or truly wise and worthwhile sayings, are like "nails driven in," or solidly fixed. This may be so because the fine words of such individuals reflect Jehovah's wisdom and can therefore serve to stabilize and support the readers or listeners. If you are a God-fearing parent, should you not make every effort to inculcate such wisdom in the mind and heart of your child?—Deuteronomy 6:4-9.

12. In your own words, how would you express what Solomon said as recorded at Ecclesiastes 12:11, 12?

13. How can the words of those possessing godly wisdom prove to be like oxgoads, and who are like "nails driven in"?

10. Why was the congregator in an excellent position to provide guidelines on the matter of remembering our Grand Creator?
11. Why should we accept Solomon's wise counsel?

¹⁴ Why, though, did Solomon say what he did about books? Well, compared with Jehovah's Word, the endless volumes of this world contain mere human reasoning. Much of this thinking reflects the mind of Satan the Devil. (2 Corinthians 4:4) Therefore, "much devotion" to such secular material produces little of lasting value. In fact, a great deal of it can be spiritually detrimental. Like Solomon, let us meditate on what God's Word says about life. This will strengthen our faith and draw us closer to Jehovah. Excessive attention to other books or sources of instruction can wear us out. Especially when such writings are the product of worldly reasoning that conflicts with godly wisdom are they unwholesome and destructive of faith in God and his purposes. So, then, let us remember that the most beneficial writings of Solomon's day and our own are those that reflect the wisdom of the "one shepherd," Jehovah God. He has provided the 66 books of the Holy Scriptures, and to these we should give paramount attention. The Bible and helpful publications of the 'faithful slave' enable

14. (a) To books of what kind is it not beneficial to give "much devotion"? (b) To what literature should we give prime consideration, and why?

How Would You Answer?

- ☐ Why would you say that not everything is vanity?
- ☐ Why should a young Christian give prayerful consideration to his sacred service?
- ☐ To books of what kind would it not be beneficial to give "much devotion"?
- ☐ What is "the whole obligation of man"?

us to acquire "the very knowledge of God." —Proverbs 2:1-6.

Our Whole Obligation to God

¹⁵ Summing up his entire investigation, the congregator, Solomon, says: "The conclusion of the matter, everything having been heard, is: Fear the true God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole obligation of man. For the true God himself will bring every sort of work into the judgment in relation to every hidden thing, as to whether it is good or bad." (Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14) A wholesome fear of, or reverential regard for, our Grand Creator will protect us, and hopefully our families, from pursuing a foolhardy course of life that could bring untold trouble and sorrow upon us and our loved ones. The wholesome fear of God is pure and is the very beginning of wisdom and knowledge. (Psalm 19:9; Proverbs 1:7) If we possess insight based on God's inspired Word and apply its counsel in all things, we will be fulfilling our "whole obligation" to God. No, it is not a matter of making a list of obligations. Rather, what is required is that we look to the Scriptures when resolving life's problems and always do things God's way.

¹⁶ We should realize that nothing escapes the notice of our Grand Creator. (Proverbs 15:3) He "will bring every sort of work into the judgment." Yes, the Most High will judge all things, including those hidden from human eyes. Awareness of such factors can serve as an incentive to observing God's commandments. But the greatest incentive should be love for our heavenly Father, for the apostle John wrote: "This is what the love of God means, that we ob-

15. (a) How would you express Solomon's words about "the whole obligation of man"? (b) What must we do if we are to fulfill our obligation to God?

16. As regards judgment, what will Jehovah do?



Unlike many books of this world, God's Word is refreshing and beneficial

serve his commandments; and yet his commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3) And since God's commandments are designed to promote our lasting welfare, surely it is not only proper but also truly wise to observe them. This is no burden for lovers of the Grand Creator. They want to fulfill their obligation to him.

Fulfill Your Whole Obligation

¹⁷ If we are wise and truly desire to fulfill our whole obligation to God, besides keeping his commandments, we will have a reverential fear of displeasing him. Indeed, "the fear of Jehovah is the beginning of wisdom," and those observing his commandments have "good insight." (Psalm 111:10; Proverbs 1:7) Let us therefore act wisely and obey Jehovah in all things. Especially is

17. What will we do if we really want to fulfill our whole obligation to God?

this vital now, for the King Jesus Christ is present, and the day of judgment by him as God's appointed Judge is near.—Matthew 24:3; 25:31, 32.

¹⁸ Each one of us is now under divine scrutiny. Are we spiritually inclined, or have worldly influences been allowed to weaken our relationship with God? (1 Corinthians 2:10-16; 1 John 2:15-17) Whether young or old, let us do all we can to please our Grand Creator. If we obey Jehovah and keep his commandments, we will reject the vain things of the passing old world. Then we can entertain the hope of everlasting life in God's promised new system of things. (2 Peter 3:13) What grand prospects these are for all who fulfill their whole obligation to God!

18. What will be the outcome for us if we fulfill our whole obligation to Jehovah God?



“Jehovah Himself Gives Wisdom”

WHAT pursuits consume your time and energy? Is making a good name for yourself a matter of concern to you? Do you devote yourself to the gathering of riches? How about pursuing a career in a certain field of endeavor or developing expertise in one or more branches of learning? Is cultivating good relationships with others important to you? Is staying in good health your main concern?

All of the foregoing may seem to have some value. But what is of prime importance? The Bible answers: “Wisdom is the prime thing. Acquire wisdom.” (Proverbs 4:7) So how may we gain wisdom, and what are its benefits? The second chapter of the Bible book of Proverbs provides the answers.

“Pay Attention to Wisdom”

In the loving words of a father, wise King Solomon of ancient Israel says: *“My son, if you will receive my sayings and treasure up my own commandments with yourself, so as to pay attention to wisdom with your ear, that you may incline your heart to discernment; if, moreover, you call out for understanding itself and you give forth your voice for discernment itself, if you keep seeking for it as for silver, and as for hid treasures you keep searching for it, in that case you will understand the fear of Jehovah,*

and you will find the very knowledge of God.”—Proverbs 2:1-5.

Do you see where the responsibility for gaining wisdom lies? In these verses, the expression “if you” appears three times. Clearly, it is up to each one of us to seek wisdom and its handmaidens—discernment and understanding. First, though, we need to “receive” and “treasure up” in memory the words of wisdom recorded in the Scriptures. For this we need to study the Bible.

Wisdom is the ability to put God-given knowledge to proper use. And how wonderfully the Bible makes wisdom available! Yes, it contains words of wisdom, such as those recorded in the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes, and we need to pay attention to these words. We also find in the pages of the Bible many examples that show the benefits of applying godly principles and the pitfalls of ignoring them. (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:11) For instance, consider the account of greedy Gehazi, the attendant of the prophet Elisha. (2 Kings 5:20-27) Does it not teach us the wisdom of avoiding greed? And what about the tragic outcome of seemingly harmless visits made by Jacob’s daughter Dinah to “the daughters of the land” of Canaan? (Genesis 34:1-31) Do we not readily discern the folly of bad associations?—Proverbs 13:20; 1 Corinthians 15:33.

Paying attention to wisdom entails acquiring discernment and understanding. According to *Webster's Revised Unabridged Dictionary*, discernment is "the power or faculty of the mind by which it distinguishes one thing from another." Godly discernment is the ability to distinguish right from wrong and then to choose the correct course. Unless we 'incline our heart' to discernment or are eager to acquire it, how can we stay on "the road leading off into life"? (Matthew 7:14; compare Deuteronomy 30:19, 20.) The study and application of God's Word imparts discernment.

How may we "call out for understanding"—the ability to see how the aspects of a subject relate to one another and to the whole? Age and experience, of course, are factors that can help us develop greater understanding—but not necessarily so. (Job 12:12; 32:6-12) "With more understanding than older men I behave," said the psalmist, "because I have observed your [Jehovah's] own orders." He also sang: "The very disclosure of your words gives light, making the inexperienced ones understand." (Psalm 119:100, 130) Jehovah is "the Ancient of Days," and he has understanding infinitely superior to that of all mankind. (Daniel 7:13) God can impart understanding to an inexperienced one, enabling him to surpass in that quality even those older in years. Therefore, we ought to be diligent in studying and applying God's Word, the Bible.

The repeated phrase "if you" in the opening passage of the second chapter of Proverbs is followed by such expressions as "receive," "treasure up," "call out," "keep seeking," "keep searching." Why does the writer use these expressions of increasing intensity? Says one reference work: "The sage [here] emphasizes the necessity of earnestness in the pursuit of wisdom." Yes, we must earnestly pursue wisdom and its related qualities—discernment and understanding.

Will You Put Forth the Effort?

A major factor in the pursuit of wisdom is the diligent study of the Bible. This study, though, should be much more than reading simply for the sake of getting information. Purposeful meditation on what we read is an essential part of studying the Scriptures. Gaining wisdom and discernment involves pondering over how we can use what we are learning in solving problems and in making decisions. Acquiring understanding calls for contemplating how the new material fits in with what we already know. Who will deny that such a reflective study of the Bible requires time and energetic effort? The investment of time and energy is similar to that spent when 'seeking for silver and searching for hid treasures.' Will you put forth the needed effort? Will you 'buy out the opportune time' to do so?—Ephesians 5:15, 16.

Consider what great treasures await us if we with an honest heart dig deep into the Bible. Why, we would find "the very knowledge of God"—the sound, stable, life-giving knowledge of our Creator! (John 17:3) "The fear of Jehovah" is also a treasure to gain. How valuable this reverential awe of him is! The healthy fear of displeasing him must govern every aspect of our life, adding a spiritual dimension to all that we do.—Ecclesiastes 12:13.

A keen desire to search and dig for spiritual treasures should be burning within us. To facilitate our search, Jehovah has provided excellent digging tools—the timely journals of truth *The Watchtower* and *Awake!*, as well as other Bible-based publications. (Matthew 24:45-47) For our education in his Word and ways, Jehovah has also provided Christian meetings. We need to attend these regularly, give ear to what is being said, put forth earnest effort to concentrate on and treasure up key thoughts, and think deeply about our relationship with Jehovah.—Hebrews 10:24, 25.

You Will Not Fail

Often, a search for buried gems, gold, or silver proves fruitless. This does not have to be the case with the search for spiritual treasures. Why not? *“Jehovah himself gives wisdom,”* Solomon assures us, *“out of his mouth there are knowledge and discernment.”* —Proverbs 2:6.

King Solomon was renowned for his wisdom. (1 Kings 4:30-32) The Scriptures reveal that he had knowledge of a variety of subjects, including plants, animals, human nature, and God’s Word. The discernment he displayed as a young king in settling the dispute between two women, each claiming to be the mother of the same child, helped to bring him international fame. (1 Kings 3:16-28) What was the source of his great learning? Solomon prayed to Jehovah for “wisdom and knowledge” and the ability “to discern between good and bad.” Jehovah granted him these. —2 Chronicles 1:10-12; 1 Kings 3:9.

We too should pray for Jehovah’s help as we diligently study his Word. The psalmist prayed: “Instruct me, O Jehovah, about your way. I shall walk in your truth. Unify my heart to fear your name.” (Psalm 86:11) Jehovah approved of that prayer, for he had it recorded in the Bible. We can be confident that our earnest and frequent prayers for his help to find spiritual treasures in the Bible will not go unanswered.—Luke 18:1-8.

Solomon points out: *“For the upright ones he will treasure up practical wisdom; for those walking in integrity he is a shield, by*



**Solomon prayed for wisdom.
So should we**

observing the paths of judgment, and he will guard the very way of his loyal ones. In that case you will understand righteousness and judgment and uprightness, the entire course of what is good.” (Proverbs 2:7-9) What a reassurance this is! Jehovah not only gives true wisdom to those who sincerely seek it but also proves to be a protective shield for the upright ones because they manifest true wisdom and loyally conform to his righteous standards. May we be among those

whom Jehovah helps to understand “the entire course of what is good.”

When “Knowledge Itself Becomes Pleasant”

Personal study of the Bible—an essential requirement for seeking wisdom—is not necessarily a pleasant prospect for many people. For example, 58-year-old Lawrence says: “I have always worked with my hands. Studying is hard for me.” And 24-year-old Michael, who did not enjoy studying in school, says: “I had to force myself to sit down and study.” Yet, a desire to study can be cultivated.

Consider what Michael did. He relates: “I disciplined myself to study for a half hour every day. Soon I could see the effect on my attitude, my comments at Christian meetings, and my conversations with others. Now I look forward to my study periods, and I hate to have anything interfere with them.” Yes, personal study becomes an acquired taste when we see the progress we make. Lawrence too applied himself to Bible study

and, in time, came to serve as an elder in a congregation of Jehovah's Witnesses.

To make personal study an enjoyable experience requires consistent effort. The benefits, though, are great. *"When wisdom enters into your heart and knowledge itself becomes pleasant to your very soul,"* says Solomon, *"thinking ability itself will keep guard over you, discernment itself will safeguard you."*—Proverbs 2:10, 11.

"To Deliver You From the Bad Way"

In what way will wisdom, knowledge, thinking ability, and discernment prove to be a safeguard? *"[They are] to deliver you from the bad way,"* says Solomon, *"from the man speaking perverse things, from those leaving the paths of uprightness to walk in the ways of darkness, from those who are rejoicing in doing bad, who are joyful in the perverse things of badness; those whose paths are crooked and who are devious in their general course."*—Proverbs 2:12-15.

Yes, those who cherish true wisdom avoid association with anyone "speaking perverse things," that is, things contrary to what is true and right. Thinking ability and discernment furnish protection against those who reject the truth only to walk in the ways of darkness and against those who are devious and who find pleasure in evil deeds.—Proverbs 3:32.

How grateful we can be that true wisdom and its associated qualities also protect us from the bad way of immoral men and women! Solomon adds that these qualities are *"to deliver you from the strange woman, from the foreign woman who has made her own sayings smooth, who is leaving the confidential friend of her youth and who has forgotten the very covenant of her God. For down to death her house does sink and down to those impotent in death her tracks. None of those having relations*

with her will come back, nor will they regain the paths of those living."—Proverbs 2:16-19.

"The strange woman," the prostitute, is portrayed as one who leaves "the confidential friend of her youth"—likely the husband of her young womanhood.* (Compare Malachi 2:14.) She has forgotten the prohibition on adultery that was a part of the Law covenant. (Exodus 20:14) Her tracks are leading to death. Those having company with her might never "regain the paths of those living," since sooner or later they may reach a point of no return, namely death, from which they cannot come back. A man of discernment and thinking ability is aware of the lures of immorality and wisely avoids getting entangled in them.

'The Upright Will Reside in the Earth'

Summing up the objective of his counsel on wisdom, Solomon states: *"The purpose is that you may walk in the way of good people and that the paths of the righteous ones you may keep."* (Proverbs 2:20) What a wonderful purpose wisdom serves! It helps us lead a happy and satisfying life that meets with God's approval.

Consider also the grand blessings that are in store for those who "walk in the way of good people." Solomon continues: *"The upright are the ones that will reside in the earth, and the blameless are the ones that will be left over in it. As regards the wicked, they will be cut off from the very earth; and as for the treacherous, they will be torn away from it."* (Proverbs 2:21, 22) May you be among the blameless who will reside forever in God's righteous new world.—2 Peter 3:13.

* The word "stranger" was applied to those who turned aside from what was in harmony with the Law and thus alienated themselves from Jehovah. Hence, the prostitute—not necessarily a foreigner—is referred to as a "strange woman."

What Can Be Done About Discouragement?

HOW can a person fight discouragement? This was the question put to several traveling overseers, who regularly visit congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. Their answers can help us to analyze the causes of discouragement and the remedies for this condition that can affect any Christian.

More than an analysis is needed to deal with discouragement, but the symptoms may include a lack of interest in prayer or in personal study, a slacking off in meeting attendance, the absence of enthusiasm, and even a certain coldness toward Christian companions. One of the most telling signs, however, is a drop in zeal for evangelizing. Let us examine the symptoms and consider some remedies.

Discouragement in Our Evangelizing Work

Jesus Christ was aware of the difficulties associated with the commission to make disciples. (Matthew 28:19, 20) He sent his followers forth as "sheep amidst wolves," knowing that their preaching activity would bring persecution upon them. (Matthew 10:16-23) Yet, this was not a reason for them to become discouraged. In fact, God's servants who have prayerfully relied on Jehovah have often been strengthened by persecution.—Acts 4:29-31; 5:41, 42.

Even when Christ's disciples were not suffering intense persecution, they were



not always favorably received. (Matthew 10:11-15)

Likewise, the preaching work of Jehovah's Witnesses is not always performed with ease today.* To many people, belief in God is a personal matter that they do not wish to discuss. Others want nothing to do with a religious organization toward which they have certain prejudices. Without a doubt, indifference, the lack of results, or various other problems can be formidable sources of discouragement. How can these obstacles be overcome?

Obtaining Better Results

The joy that we draw from our ministry is partly related to the results obtained. How, then, can we have a more productive ministry? Well, we are "fishers of men." (Mark 1:16-18) Fishermen in ancient Israel went fishing at night when they could catch the most fish. We too need to analyze our territory so that we go "fishing" when the majority of the people are at home and are more receptive to our message. This may be in the evening, on weekends, or at some other time. According to one traveling overseer, this is practical in areas where people work all day. He notes that evening witnessing often brings excellent results. Telephone or informal witnessing also enables us to reach more people.

* See the article "The House-to-House Challenge" in *The Watchtower*, May 15, 1981.

Perseverance in the ministry produces good results. In Eastern Europe and in certain African countries, the Kingdom-preaching work is progressing well, and this has resulted in fine increases. Similarly, many congregations have been formed in areas long considered unproductive or even in territory covered very frequently. However, what if yours is not producing such results?

Maintaining a Good Attitude

Having clearly in mind the goals set by Jesus will help us not to become discouraged in the face of indifference in the ministry. Christ wanted his disciples to search out deserving ones, not to perform mass conversions. On several occasions he pointed out that the vast majority would not accept the good news, just as most Israelites did not listen to the prophets of old.—Ezekiel 9:4; Matthew 10:11-15; Mark 4:14-20.

The “good news of the kingdom” is received with gratitude by individuals “conscious of their spiritual need.” (Matthew 5:3; 24:14) They want to serve God in the way that he specifies. Hence, the results of our activity are related more to the heart condition of the people than to our aptitude for presenting the message. Of course, we need to do our best to make the good news appealing. Yet, the results depend on God, for Jesus said: “No man can come to me unless the Father, who sent me, draws him.”—John 6:44.

Our evangelizing work makes Jehovah’s name known. Whether people listen or not, our preaching activity contributes to the sanctification of Jehovah’s holy name. Furthermore, by means of our evangelizing work, we prove that we are Christ’s disciples, and we have the privilege of sharing in the most important mission being carried out in our day.—Matthew 6:9; John 15:8.

Discouragement and Relationships

Certain human relationships, either in the family or in the congregation, can cause discouragement. For instance, there is the feeling of not being understood. The imperfections of fellow believers may also discourage us. Once again, the Scriptures can be of great help to us.

“The whole association of brothers” worldwide makes up a large spiritual family. (1 Peter 2:17) But the feeling of belonging to a united people can fade when difficulties arise because of personality conflicts. Evidently, first-century Christians were not immune to such problems, since the apostle Paul repeatedly had to remind them to live together in unity. For example, he exhorted two Christian women—Euodia and Syntyche—to resolve their differences.—1 Corinthians 1:10; Ephesians 4:1-3; Philippians 4:2, 3.

If this is the problem, how can we rekindle a sincere love for our brothers and sisters? By reminding ourselves that Christ died for them and that they, like us, have exercised faith in his ransom sacrifice. We can also bear in mind that many of our brothers are prepared to imitate Jesus Christ by risking their lives for us.

Some years ago, in Paris, France, a young Witness did not hesitate to grab hold of a suitcase containing a bomb that had been put outside the Kingdom Hall. He ran down several flights of stairs before throwing it into a fountain, where it exploded. Asked what motivated him to risk his life in this way, he answered: “I realized that our lives were in danger. So I thought it was better for me to die alone than for all of us to be killed.”* What a blessing it is to have such

* See pages 12 and 13 in *Awake!* of February 22, 1985, published by the Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.

companions who are ready to follow Jesus' example so closely!

Additionally, we can meditate on the spirit of cooperation that existed among Jehovah's Witnesses who were in the concentration camps during World War II.* More recently, our brothers and sisters in Malawi just as faithfully stood their ground as true Christians. Does not the thought that our brothers in the local congregation would act in the same way under adverse circumstances move us to overlook or at least minimize daily tensions and difficulties? If we cultivate the mind of Christ, our everyday relations with fellow worshipers will be a source of refreshment, not discouragement.

Discouraging Personal Feelings

"Expectation postponed is making the heart sick, but the thing desired is a tree of life when it does come." (Proverbs 13:12) In the eyes of some of Jehovah's servants, the end of this system of things is not coming soon enough. Christians find the period in which we are living 'critical and hard to deal with,' just as many unbelievers do. —2 Timothy 3:1-5.

* See the articles "I Survived the 'Death March'" in *The Watchtower* of August 15, 1980, and "Keeping Integrity in Nazi Germany" in *Awake!* of June 22, 1985.

In Our Next Issue

Should You Fear the Apocalypse?

Our Parents Taught Us to Love God

Do Not Let Your Strength
Become Your Weakness

In contrast with unbelievers, however, Christians should rejoice to see in these trialsome conditions the "sign" of Jesus' presence, which indicates that God's Kingdom will soon bring an end to this wicked system of things. (Matthew 24:3-14) Even when the situation gets worse—as it certainly will during the "great tribulation"—these events are a source of joy to us because they herald God's incoming new world.—Matthew 24:21; 2 Peter 3:13.

Mentally putting off the Kingdom's intervention in present-day affairs could cause a Christian to devote more and more time to material pursuits. If he were to allow such things as secular work and entertainment to take up all his time and energy, it would be hard for him to fulfill his Scriptural responsibilities properly. (Matthew 6:24, 33, 34) Such an attitude promotes frustration and thus discouragement. One traveling overseer commented: "It is unrealistic to attempt to build a poor imitation of the new system in this system of things."

Two of the Best Remedies

Once a diagnosis has been made, how can an individual find a good remedy? Personal study is one of the best methods available. Why? "It reminds us why we have to do what we do," remarked a traveling overseer. Still another explained: "Preaching merely out of obligation becomes burdensome in time." But good personal study helps us to regain a sharp view of our role as we get closer to the end. In the same line of thought, the Scriptures repeatedly remind us of the need to be well fed spiritually in order to have true happiness in doing God's will.—Psalm 1:1-3; 19:7-10; 119:1, 2.

Elders can help others to overcome discouragement by making encouraging shepherding calls on them. During these private visits, elders can show that each of us

**Upbuilding
shepherding calls by
loving elders can help
Christians overcome
discouragement**

is greatly appreciated and occupies an important place among Jehovah's people. (1 Corinthians 12:20-26) Referring to fellow Christians, one elder said: "To underscore their value, I remind them of what they have accomplished in the past. I point out that they are precious in Jehovah's eyes and that the blood of his Son has been given in their behalf. This reasoning is always well received. Once this has been backed up with solid Biblical references, those who are discouraged are in a position to set new goals, such as family prayer and study and Bible reading."—Hebrews 6:10.

During shepherding calls, elders need to be careful not to make it appear that God is impossible to please. Instead, the elders can help discouraged fellow worshipers to see that the load on Jesus' followers is light. Consequently, our Christian service is a source of joy.—Matthew 11:28-30.

Vanquishing Discouragement

Whatever its causes, discouragement is a scourge that must be fought. Remember, though, that we are not alone in this fight. If we are discouraged, let us accept the help

of our Christian companions, especially the elders. By doing so, we may lessen feelings of discouragement.

Above all, we need to turn to God for help in overcoming discouragement. If we prayerfully rely on Jehovah, he may help us to vanquish discouragement entirely. (Psalm 55:22; Philippians 4:6, 7) In any case, as his people we can share the sentiments of the psalmist who sang: "Happy are the people knowing the joyful shouting. O Jehovah, in the light of your face they keep walking. In your name they are joyful all day long and in your righteousness they are exalted. For you are the beauty of their strength; and by your goodwill our horn is exalted."—Psalm 89:15-17.



"My Visit to the Kingdom Hall"

Laura,* a college student, was assigned to attend a religious service and write a report about her experience. She chose Jehovah's Witnesses, and she entitled her essay "My Visit to the Kingdom Hall." What did Laura find different about the Witnesses? Among the many things she mentioned were the following.

Children: "All the children were in the same room as the adults. In all the churches that I have attended, the children leave their parents and have to attend Sunday School."

Racial harmony: "Usually, churches draw in members of a certain race or ethnic group. . . . Yet, the Jehovah's Witnesses were all sitting together and not in certain cliques."

* A substitute name.



A welcoming spirit: "Many people came and spoke to me. . . . Some even asked me if I was studying the Bible with anyone. Yet, I did not feel that they were pressuring me. They . . . left the decision to me."



No collections: "One thing that really surprised me was the fact that nobody took an offering. . . . The churches that I've been to even took offerings in the children's classes."

There are nearly 90,000 congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses worldwide. Why not visit the one nearest you?

