

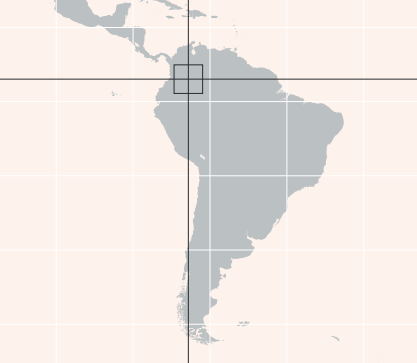
APRIL 2016

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:  
MAY 30–JUNE 26, 2016



COVER IMAGE:  
**COLOMBIA**

The Wayuu people like to talk about God. Many efforts are made to reach them with the good news. They are skilled artisans who usually sell their products in the city. There they hear the good news through public witnessing

PUBLISHERS  
**166,049**

BIBLE STUDIES  
**229,723**

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE  
(2015)  
**510,952**

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# IS YOUR MINISTRY LIKE THE DEW?

OUR ministry is important and valuable. But not everyone to whom we preach appreciates this. Even if people show interest in the Bible's message, they may not always see the need to study God's Word with us.

This was true of Gavin, who began to attend congregation meetings; yet, he declined the offer of a Bible study. He says: "My Scriptural knowledge was minimal, and I was reluctant to reveal my ignorance. I was wary of being deceived, and I was wary of commitment." What do you think? Was Gavin a lost cause? No! Consider the good effect that Bible teachings can have on a person. Jehovah told his ancient people: "My words will trickle as the dew, as gentle rains upon grass." (Deut. 31:19, 30; 32:2) The characteristics of dew nicely illustrate how we can effectively help people of all sorts in our ministry.—1 Tim. 2:3, 4.

## MINISTRY LIKE THE DEW—HOW?

**Dew is gentle.** Dew forms gradually, accumulating drop by drop from the water vapor in the air. Jehovah's words 'trickled as the dew' in that he spoke kindly, gently, and considerately to his people. We imitate him when we show respect for another person's viewpoint. We encourage people to reason for themselves and thus draw their own conclusions. When we show such consideration, our words are more readily absorbed and our ministry is more effective.

**Dew is refreshing.** Our ministry refreshes others when we ponder how best to further their interests. Gavin, mentioned earlier, was not pressured to accept a Bible study. Instead Chris, the brother who initially approached him, explored different ways to make Gavin feel more comfortable discussing the Bible. Chris explained to Gavin that the Bible has a theme and that discerning it would help him better understand the meetings he was attending. Next, Chris revealed that it was Bible prophecy that convinced him personally that the Bible is true. This led to several discussions about the fulfillment of prophecy. Gavin felt refreshed by these conversations and finally accepted a Bible study.

**Dew is life-sustaining.** The land of Israel experiences a hot, dry season during which rain may not fall for several months. Without the moisture provided by dew, plants wither and die. A spiri-

tual drought exists today, just as Jehovah foretold. (Amos 8:11) He promised that anointed evangelizers would be "like dew from Jehovah" as they proclaim the Kingdom message, supported by their companions of the "other sheep." (Mic. 5:7; John 10:16) Do we value our message of Kingdom good news as part of Jehovah's provision of life-sustaining spiritual moisture?

**Dew is a blessing from Jehovah.** (Deut. 33:13) Our ministry can be a blessing to those who respond. Gavin received just such a blessing. Through his Bible study, he found answers to all his questions. He quickly progressed to baptism and now, along with his wife, Joyce, enjoys a full share in preaching the Kingdom good news.

## VALUE YOUR MINISTRY

Thinking about dew can also encourage us to place a high value on our personal share in the ministry. How so? Individual drops of water achieve very little, but the combined effect of millions of dewdrops saturates the earth with moisture. Likewise, our individual share in the ministry may seem very small to us. However, the combined effort of all of Jehovah's willing ministers contributes to the giving of a witness "to all the nations." (Matt. 24:14) Will our ministry prove to be a blessing from Jehovah to others? It will when the message we preach is just like dew—gentle, refreshing, and life-sustaining!



Jehovah's Witnesses are saturating the earth with the Kingdom message





## Being Faithful Leads to God’s Approval

*“Be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.”—HEB. 6:12.*

THE anxious wait is over. Relieved to see her father returning safely from battle, the young woman races to greet him and rejoices over his astounding victory. Instead of joining her in song and dance, he rips apart his battle-stained garments and cries out: “Oh no, my daughter! You have broken my heart.” Then he utters the words that change her life forever, shattering her dreams and hopes of a normal life. Yet, without hesitation, she makes a beautiful reply, encouraging her father to follow through on what he promised Jehovah. Her words reveal her great faith. She trusts that whatever Jehovah asks is best for her. (Judg. 11:34-37) Her father’s heart swells with pride because he knows that his daughter’s willingness to support his decision brings Jehovah’s smile of approval.

<sup>2</sup> Jephthah and his God-fearing daughter put their trust and confidence in Jehovah’s way of doing things, even when

1, 2. What challenge did Jephthah and his daughter face?

SONGS: 86, 54

### CAN YOU ANSWER?

How can the example of Jephthah and his daughter help us resist worldly influences?

What Bible principles do you find helpful in resolving personal conflicts?

How has this article encouraged you to make sacrifices for the Kingdom?

it was hard to do so. They were convinced that gaining God's approval was worth any sacrifice.

<sup>3</sup> We know that it is not always easy to stay faithful to Jehovah. The reality is that we need to "put up a hard fight for the faith." (Jude 3) To help us do so, let us consider the challenges that Jephthah and his daughter successfully coped with. How did they remain faithful to Jehovah?

### STAYING FAITHFUL DESPITE WORLDLY INFLUENCES

<sup>4</sup> Every day, Jephthah and his daughter would have been reminded of the disastrous consequences of unfaithfulness to Jehovah. Nearly 300 years earlier, their forefathers had been commanded to exterminate all the pagan inhabitants in the Promised Land. (Deut. 7:1-4) The Israelites' failure to obey led many of them to adopt the sinful ways of the Canaanites, causing them to become ensnared by false gods and degenerate, immoral practices.—**Read Psalm 106:34-39.**

<sup>5</sup> That rebellion, in turn, brought Jehovah's disapproval; he no longer granted them his protective care. (Judg. 2:1-3, 11-15; Ps. 106:40-43) What a challenge it must have been for God-fearing families to remain loyal to Jehovah during those hard years! Nevertheless, the Bible reveals that there were faithful ones, such as Jephthah and his daughter as well as Elkanah, Hannah, and Samu-

el, who were determined to gain God's approval.—1 Sam. 1:20-28; 2:26.

<sup>6</sup> We live in a world where people think and act in ways that are similar to those in ancient Canaan—they glorify sex and violence and promote materialism. Jehovah has given us clear warnings—just as he did the Israelites—to safeguard us from such influences. Will we learn from the mistakes of the Israelites? (1 Cor. 10:6-11) We must strive to remove any trace of Canaanitelike thinking from our lives. (Rom. 12:2) Have we been faithful in making an effort to do so?

### REMAINING FAITHFUL DESPITE DISAPPOINTMENTS

<sup>7</sup> In Jephthah's day, the disobedience of the Israelites resulted in their becoming enslaved to the Philistines and the Ammonites. (Judg. 10:7, 8) However, Jephthah's challenges came not only from the enemy nations but also from his own brothers and the leaders of Israel. Jealousy and hatred moved his half brothers to drive him away, illegally depriving him of his rightful inheritance as firstborn. (Judg. 11:1-3) Jephthah refused to allow their cruel behavior to control his attitude. Instead of spitefully ignoring a plea for help from the elders of the nation, he came to their aid. (Judg. 11:4-11) What may have motivated Jephthah to react as a spiritual man?

<sup>8</sup> Not only was Jephthah a mighty warrior but he was a student of God's deal-

3. Why can the example of Jephthah and his daughter be helpful for us today?

4, 5. (a) What command did Jehovah give the Israelites when they entered the Promised Land? (b) According to Psalm 106, what happened to the Israelites because of their disobedience?

6. What worldly influences exist today, and what must we do?

7. (a) What did Jephthah's own people do to him? (b) How did Jephthah react?

8, 9. (a) What principles in the Mosaic Law may have helped Jephthah? (b) What was of greatest importance to Jephthah?

ings with His people. Jephthah's thorough grasp of Israel's history gave him a clear picture of what was right and what was wrong in Jehovah's eyes. (Judg. 11:12-27) Godly principles that were embedded in the Mosaic Law molded Jephthah's thinking as well as his heart. He knew that Jehovah disapproved of holding grudges; rather, God required that His people love one another. The Law also taught that a person must not ignore the needs of others, even of someone who "hates" him.—**Read Exodus 23:5; Leviticus 19:17, 18.**

<sup>9</sup> Examples of faithful ones like Joseph, who showed mercy to his brothers—even though "they began to hate him"—may also have influenced Jephthah's response. (Gen. 37:4; 45:4, 5) Meditating on such examples would have helped Jephthah to choose a course of action that was pleasing to Jehovah. The conduct of his brothers no doubt hurt him deeply, but he would not hold back from serving Jehovah and His people. (Judg. 11:9) The fight to defend Jehovah's name was more important to Jephthah than any personal conflicts. He was determined to be faithful to Jehovah, resulting in good for himself and for others.—Heb. 11:32, 33.

<sup>10</sup> Will we allow Jephthah's example to touch our hearts? Perhaps we have experienced disappointment or ill-treatment from certain Christian brothers. If so, we should not allow such challenges to hold us back from attending Christian meetings or serving Jehovah and being with the congregation to the full. In imitation of Jephthah, we too can allow divine standards to help us

10. How can we allow divine principles to help us act as Christians today?

overcome negative circumstances and continue to be a force for good.—Rom. 12:20, 21; Col. 3:13.

## WILLING SACRIFICES REVEAL OUR FAITH

<sup>11</sup> Jephthah realized that he would need God's help to free Israel from the Ammonites. He promised Jehovah that if He gave him the victory, he would offer to Jehovah, as "a burnt offering," the first one who came out of his house when he returned home from the battle. (Judg. 11:30, 31) What did that offering involve?

<sup>12</sup> The sacrificing of humans is something detestable to Jehovah. Thus, it is clear that Jephthah did not intend to sacrifice anyone literally. (Deut. 18:9, 10) Under the Mosaic Law, a burnt offering was given entirely to Jehovah, so Jephthah evidently meant that he would devote the person to the exclusive service of God. This promise implied permanent service at the tabernacle. Jehovah accepted Jephthah's terms and blessed him with a resounding victory, striking and subduing the enemy. (Judg. 11:32, 33) But who would be the person given as "a burnt offering" to God?

<sup>13</sup> Recall the scene described at the beginning of this article. When Jephthah returns from battle, who goes out to meet him but his beloved daughter, his only child! Now comes the test. Will he keep his word and give over his daughter so that she could serve at the tabernacle for the rest of her life?

<sup>14</sup> Again, divine principles must have guided Jephthah to make the right

11, 12. What vow did Jephthah make, and what did this involve?

13, 14. What do Jephthah's words recorded at Judges 11:35 reveal about his faith?

choice. Perhaps he recalled the words of Exodus 23:19, which instructed God's people to be willing to give their best to Jehovah. The Law also indicated that once a man made a vow, fulfillment was compulsory. It states: "If a man makes a vow to Jehovah . . . , he must not violate his word. He should do everything he vowed he would do." (Num. 30:2) Like faithful Hannah, who was probably a contemporary of his, Jephthah would be called on to live up to his vow, knowing what it meant for his own future and that of his daughter. He had no other child; his daughter was his only hope for a descendant, someone to carry on his name and his inheritance in Israel. (Judg. 11:34) Nevertheless, Judges 11:35 concludes with Jephthah saying: "I have opened my mouth to Jehovah, and I am unable to turn back." His faithfulness even at great personal cost brought him God's approval and blessing. Would you have made the same choice?

<sup>15</sup> When we dedicated our lives to Jehovah, we vowed that we would do his will unreservedly. We knew that living up to that promise would require self-sacrifice. However, our willingness is especially put to the test when we are asked to do things that are not initially to our liking. When we make such sacrifices and serve God in a way that takes us out of our comfort zone, we prove ourselves faithful. The resulting blessings are always far greater than any sacrifices we may make, painful as they may be. (Mal. 3:10) But what about Jephthah's daughter?

<sup>16</sup> It could not have been easy for Jephthah's daughter to accept the consequences of her father's vow. This was different from Hannah's vow, by which she dedicated her son Samuel to serve at

15. What vow have many of us made, and how can we prove faithful?

16. How did Jephthah's daughter react to her father's promise? (See opening picture.)



How can we display faith like that of Jephthah and his daughter?  
(See paragraphs 16, 17)





the tabernacle as a Nazirite. (1 Sam. 1: 11) A Nazirite was able to marry and have a family. But Jephthah's daughter was to be a whole "burnt offering"; she would have to forgo such joys. (Judg. 11:37-40) As the daughter of the victorious chief and leader in Israel, she might have been given in marriage to the best man in the land. But now she was to become a humble servant at the tabernacle. How did the young woman respond? She showed that she put Jehovah's service first by saying: "My father, if you have opened your mouth to Jehovah, do to me as you have promised." (Judg. 11: 36) She sacrificed her natural desires for a husband and children in order to promote true worship. How might we imitate her self-sacrificing attitude?

<sup>17</sup> Thousands of young Christian men and women are willingly sacrificing mar-

17. (a) How can we imitate the faith of Jephthah and his daughter? (b) How do the words at Hebrews 6:10-12 encourage you to be self-sacrificing?

riage or are not having children—at least for now—in order to serve Jehovah to the full. Older ones too may be sacrificing the time they could otherwise spend with their children and grandchildren in order to work on theocratic construction projects or to attend the School for Kingdom Evangelizers and to serve in areas where the need for Kingdom publishers is greater. Others set aside personal matters to share in service campaigns during the Memorial season. Such wholehearted service brings deep joy to Jehovah, who will never forget their work and the love shown for him. **(Read Hebrews 6:10-12.)** Would it be possible for you to make additional sacrifices to serve Jehovah more fully?

### LESSONS LEARNED

<sup>18</sup> Although Jephthah's life was full of challenges, he allowed Jehovah's thinking to guide his choices in life. He rejected the influences of the world around him. Bitter disappointments caused by others failed to weaken his determination to remain faithful. His willing sacrifices and those of his daughter led to blessings, as Jehovah used both of them to promote pure worship. At a time when others abandoned divine standards, Jephthah and his daughter clung to them.

<sup>19</sup> The Bible urges us to "be imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises." (Heb. 6:12) May we be like Jephthah and his daughter by living in harmony with a fundamental truth that their lives highlight: Faithfulness leads to God's approval.

18, 19. What have we learned from the Bible account about Jephthah and his daughter, and how can we imitate them?



# ARE YOU USING YOUR IMAGINATION WISELY?

WHAT weighs just about three pounds (1.4 kg) but has been referred to as “the most complex thing we have yet discovered in our universe”? The human brain. It is truly awe-inspiring. The more we learn about it, the greater our appreciation for Jehovah’s “wonderful” works will be. (Ps. 139:14) Consider just one of our brain’s many faculties—imagination.

What is imagination? One dictionary defines it as “the ability that you have to form pictures or ideas in your mind of things that are new and exciting, or things that you have not experienced.” With that definition in mind, would you not agree that you use your imagination quite regularly? For example, have you ever read or heard about a place that you have not visited? Did that prevent you from picturing it in your mind? Really, whenever we think of something that we cannot see, hear, taste, touch, or smell, our imagination is at work.

The Bible helps us to appreciate that humans were designed and created in God’s image. (Gen. 1:26, 27) Does that not imply that, in a sense, Jehovah himself possesses an imagination? Since he has seen fit to create us with this capacity, he reasonably expects us to use it in grasping his will. (Eccl. 3:11) How can we use our imagination wisely to do that, and what foolish uses of imagination should we avoid?



## FOOLISH USES OF IMAGINATION

### **(1) Daydreaming at the wrong time or about the wrong things.**

Daydreaming in itself is not wrong. In fact, there is evidence that daydreaming can be beneficial. However, Ecclesiastes 3:1 helps us to appreciate that since there is “a time for every activity,” it is possible to engage in some activities at the wrong time. For instance, if we allow our mind to wander during congregation meetings or personal Bible study, is our imagination a help or a hindrance? Jesus himself offered a sobering warning on the danger of allowing our mind to entertain wrong thoughts, such as immoral fantasies. (Matt. 5:28) Some of the things that we could allow ourselves to imagine would be deeply displeasing to Jehovah. Immoral fantasies can be a stepping-stone to immoral realities. Be determined never to allow your imagination to draw you away from Jehovah!

### **(2) Assuming that material riches can provide lasting security.**

Material things are necessary and useful. However, we will surely be disappointed if we begin to imagine that real security and happiness result from them. The wise man Solomon wrote: “The wealth of the rich is his fortified city; it is like a protective wall *in his*



## WISE USES OF IMAGINATION

### **(1) Foreseeing dangerous situations and avoiding them.**

The Scriptures encourage us to be shrewd and to think ahead. (Prov. 22:3) Using our imagination, we can consider the potential consequences of decisions before we make them. For example, if you are invited to a social event, how could your imagination help you to make a wise decision about whether to attend? After considering such factors as who else is invited, the size of the gathering, and where and when it will be held, think: ‘What is likely to happen there?’ Can you realistically imagine a wholesome gathering that will be in harmony with Bible principles? This process can enable you to visualize the event in your mind. Using your imagination to make wise decisions will help you to avoid spiritually harmful situations.

### **(2) Rehearsing mentally how to handle difficult problems.**

Imagination also includes the “ability to confront and deal with a problem.” Suppose you have had a misunderstanding with someone in the congregation. How will you approach your brother or sister to try to restore peace? There are many factors to consider. What is his or her communication style? When would it be most appropriate to talk

*imagination.”* (Prov. 18:11) Consider, for example, what happened when over 80 percent of Manila, Philippines, was flooded by torrential rains in September 2009. Did those with many material things escape? A wealthy man who lost much said, “The flood was a great equalizer, bringing difficulties and sufferings to both the rich and the poor.” It may be easy to imagine that material things offer true protection and security. The reality is that they do not.

### **(3) Worrying unnecessarily about things that may never happen.**

Jesus counseled us not to be overly “anxious.” (Matt. 6:34) Being a chronic worrier requires an active imagination. We can easily waste a lot of energy worrying about imaginary problems, that is, problems that have not yet developed or that may never occur. The Scriptures indicate that such anxiety can lead to discouragement and even depression. (Prov. 12:25, ftn.) How important it is to apply Jesus’ counsel by not worrying excessively and by dealing with each day’s concerns as they come.



about the problem? What words and tone of voice would be best to use? By putting your imagination to work, you can mentally rehearse various ways to handle the situation and choose the one that you feel will be the most effective and well-received. (Prov. 15: 28, ftn.) Such a thoughtful approach to handling a difficult situation will help promote peace in the congregation. That is certainly a good use of imagination.

### **(3) Enriching your personal Bible reading and study.**

Reading the Bible daily is essential. However, more is needed than just covering material. We need to discern the practical lessons found in the pages of the Bible and be motivated to apply them in our life. Our appreciation for Jehovah's ways needs to be heightened through our Bible reading. Using our imagination can help us to do this. How? Consider the publication *Imitate Their Faith*. Reading the accounts in this book can fire our imagination by helping us to picture the setting and background of each Bible character. We are helped to see the sights, hear the sounds, smell the aromas, and discern the feelings of those involved. This results in our identifying wonderful lessons and encouraging thoughts from Bible accounts that we may have felt we already knew quite well. Using our imagination in this way during our personal Bible reading and study will help make it truly enriching.

### **(4) Cultivating and displaying empathy.**

Empathy is a beautiful quality that has been described as feeling another person's pain

in *our* heart. Since both Jehovah and Jesus show empathy, we do well to imitate them. (Ex. 3:7; Ps. 72:13) How can we develop this quality? One of the most powerful ways to cultivate empathy involves using our imagination. We may never have experienced what our fellow Christian brother or sister is going through. Yet, you can ask yourself: 'If I were in this situation, how would I feel? What would I need?' Using our imagination to answer these questions will help us to be more empathetic. Really, every aspect of our Christian life will benefit when we show empathy, including in our ministry and in our relationships with other Christians.

### **(5) Picturing what life will be like in the new world.**

The Scriptures are full of vivid details describing life in God's promised new world. (Isa. 35:5-7; 65:21-25; Rev. 21:3, 4) Our publications complement these descriptions with many beautiful artistic depictions. Why? Artwork fuels our imagination and helps us to see ourselves enjoying the reality of these promised blessings. Jehovah, the Creator of imagination, knows better than anyone how powerful this faculty is. Using it to reflect on his promises can fill us with confidence in their fulfillment and help us to remain faithful, even as we endure present challenges of life.

Jehovah has lovingly given us the amazing faculty of imagination. It can really help us to serve him well in our daily lives. May we show our appreciation to the Giver of this wonderful gift by using it wisely each day.



## “Let Endurance Complete Its Work”

*“Let endurance complete its work, so that you may be complete and sound in all respects, not lacking in anything.”—JAS. 1:4.*

THE battle was grueling. Israelite soldiers led by Judge Gideon had chased their enemies—the Midianite army and its allies—all night for a distance of some 20 miles (32 km)! The Bible relates what happened next: “Gideon then came to the Jordan and crossed it. He and the 300 men with him were tired.” Nevertheless, Gideon and his men had not yet won the war, for about 15,000 enemy soldiers remained. After having suffered years of Midianite oppression, the Israelites knew that this was no time to give up. So to eliminate the enemy, “they kept up the pursuit” and subdued Midian.—Judg. 7:22; 8:4, 10, 28.

<sup>2</sup> We too are fighting a relentless battle. Our enemies include Satan, his world, and our own imperfections. Some of us have battled for decades, and with Jehovah’s help, we gained victories. At times, though, we may get tired of battling our enemies and of waiting for the end of this system of things. Indeed, we have not yet won the complete victory.

1, 2. (a) What can we learn from the endurance of Gideon and his 300 men? (See opening picture.) (b) According to Luke 21:19, why is endurance so important?

SONGS: 135, 139

### WHAT DO YOU THINK?

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What will help you to endure?

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Who are some outstanding examples of endurance?

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What does it mean to “let endurance complete its work”?

Jesus warned that we who live in the last days would face severe trials and cruel mistreatment, but he also said that gaining the victory would depend on our endurance. **(Read Luke 21:19.)** What is endurance? What will help us to endure? What can we learn from those who have endured? And how can we “let endurance complete its work”?—Jas. 1:4.

### WHAT IS ENDURANCE?

<sup>3</sup> In the Bible, enduring means more than simply putting up with trials or adversity. Endurance involves our mind and heart, or the way we react to hardships. A person who endures manifests courage, steadfastness, and patience. Endurance is “the spirit which can bear things, not simply with resignation, but with blazing hope,” says one reference work. “It is the quality which keeps a man on his feet with his face to the wind. It is the virtue which can transmute the hardest trial into glory because beyond the pain it sees the goal.”

<sup>4</sup> Christian endurance is motivated by love. **(Read 1 Corinthians 13:4, 7.)** Love for Jehovah motivates us to endure anything that is in harmony with his will. (Luke 22:41, 42) Love for our brothers helps us to endure their imperfections. (1 Pet. 4:8) Love for our marriage mate enables us to endure “tribulation” that even happily married couples experience and to strengthen the marital bond.—1 Cor. 7:28.

### WHAT WILL HELP YOU TO ENDURE?

<sup>5</sup> *Turn to Jehovah for strength.* Jehovah

3. What is endurance?

4. Why can we say that endurance is motivated by love?

5. Why is Jehovah the best one to help us endure?

is “the God who supplies endurance and comfort.” (Rom. 15:5) He alone fully understands not only the problems we face but also the way our environment, emotions, and even our genetic makeup affect us. He is thus the best one to equip us to endure. “He satisfies the desire of those who fear him,” the Bible says. “He hears their cry for help, and he rescues them.” (Ps. 145:19) How, though, will God answer our prayers for strength to endure?

<sup>6</sup> **Read 1 Corinthians 10:13.** When we ask Jehovah to help us cope with trials, he will “make the way out.” Does Jehovah maneuver matters to remove the trial? Perhaps. Often, however, he makes the way out “so that [we] may be able to endure it.” Yes, Jehovah strengthens us so that we “may endure fully with patience and joy.” (Col. 1:11) And since he knows our physical, mental, and emotional limits so intimately, Jehovah will never allow a situation to develop to a point that we cannot remain faithful.

<sup>7</sup> *Nourish your faith with spiritual food.* On Mount Everest, the world’s tallest mountain, a climber burns about 6,000 calories a day, considerably more than the average person needs. To endure the ascent and reach their goal, climbers must consume as many calories as possible. Similarly, to endure in our Christian course and reach our goal, we must regularly take in as much spiritual food as possible. We need self-discipline to devote time to reading, study, and our Christian meetings. These activities

6. As promised in the Bible, how may Jehovah “make the way out” of trials for us?

7. Illustrate why we need spiritual food to endure.



nourish our faith with “the food that remains for everlasting life.”—John 6:27.

<sup>8</sup> *Remember the issue of integrity.* When a servant of Jehovah faces a trial, there is much more at stake than one person’s suffering. By the way we react to our trials, we demonstrate whether we really view Jehovah as the Universal Sovereign. Satan, an enemy of Jehovah’s sovereignty, taunted Jehovah with the words: “A man will give everything that he has for his life. But, for a change, stretch out your hand and strike [Job’s] bone and flesh, and he will surely curse you to your very face.” (Job 2:4, 5) According to Satan, no one serves Jehovah out of unselfish love. Has Satan changed since he made that claim? Not at all! Many centuries later, when he was ousted from heaven, Satan was still called “the accuser of our brothers . . . , who accuses them day and night before our God!” (Rev. 12:10) Satan has not forgotten the issue of integrity. He is eager to see us surrender to our trial and withdraw our support of God’s sovereignty.

<sup>9</sup> When you struggle with adversity, therefore, imagine this invisible scene. Satan and his demonic followers are on one side, pointing to your struggles and alleging that you will buckle under the pressure and give up. On the other side are Jehovah, his reigning Son, the resurrected anointed ones, and myriads of angels. They are cheering you on, delighted by your daily endurance and support of Jehovah’s sovereignty. You can take personally Jehovah’s inspired request: “Be wise, my son, and make my heart re-

joice, so that I can make a reply to him who taunts me.”—Prov. 27:11.

<sup>10</sup> *Focus on the rewards of endurance.* Suppose that while traveling on a lengthy journey, you stop in the middle of a long tunnel. Everywhere you look, it is dark. Nevertheless, you are confident that if you keep traveling toward the end of the tunnel, you will again see light. Similarly, you may at times feel overwhelmed by the problems you face. Even Jesus could have felt that way. He was the target of “hostile speech from sinners,” humiliation, and even painful execution on “a torture stake”—surely the darkest period of his life on earth! Yet, Jesus endured it all “for the joy that was set before him.” (Heb. 12:2, 3) He focused on the rewards of his endurance, particularly his contribution to the sanctification of God’s name and the vindication of Jehovah’s sovereignty. The darkness of Jesus’ trials was temporary, but the brilliance of his heavenly reward would be everlasting. Today, the trials you face may be painful and even crushing. But remember that your tribulations on the road to eternal life are temporary.

#### **“THOSE WHO HAVE ENDURED”**

<sup>11</sup> We do not have to endure alone. To encourage Christians to endure the hardships heaped on them by Satan, the apostle Peter wrote: “Take your stand against him, firm in the faith, knowing that the same kind of sufferings are being experienced by the entire association of your brothers in the world.” (1 Pet. 5:9) The experiences of “those

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8, 9. (a) According to Job 2:4, 5, what is involved when we face trials? (b) When you face trials, what invisible scene might you imagine?

10. How can you imitate Jesus in focusing on the rewards of endurance?

11. Why should we consider the experiences of “those who have endured”?



When we endure trials,  
our Christian personality  
becomes more complete  
(See paragraphs 15, 16)



who have endured” teach us how to remain steadfast, reassure us that we can succeed, and remind us that our faithful course will be rewarded. (Jas. 5: 11) Let us consider a few examples.<sup>[1]</sup>

<sup>12</sup> *The cherubs.* The example set by some of the first spirit creatures to appear to humans can teach us to endure in a difficult assignment. Jehovah God “posted at the east of the garden of Eden the cherubs and the flaming blade of a sword that was turning continuously to guard the way to the tree of life.”<sup>[2]</sup> (Gen. 3:24) Surely those cherubs were not originally created for this assignment! After all, sin and rebellion were not part of Jehovah’s purpose for mankind. Yet, nowhere do we read that the cherubs—spirit creatures of high rank—complained that they were overqualified for this task. They did not become bored and give up. Rather, they obediently stuck to their assignment and endured until their work was completed—perhaps at the time of the Flood, over 1,600 years later!

<sup>13</sup> *The patriarch Job.* If you are crushed

12. What do we learn from the example of the cherubs posted at Eden?

13. How was Job able to endure his trials?

by the discouraging words of a friend or family member, are plagued by a serious illness, or are grieved by the death of a loved one, you can find comfort in the example of Job. (Job 1:18, 19; 2: 7, 9; 19:1-3) Although he was unaware of the source of his troubles, Job did not give up in despair. Why not? For one thing, “he feared God.” (Job 1:1) Job was determined to please Jehovah in favorable and unfavorable circumstances. With God’s help, Job reflected on the wondrous things Jehovah had already accomplished by means of His holy spirit. Job became even more confident that Jehovah would end his trials at the right time. (Job 42:1, 2) And that is precisely what happened. “Jehovah removed Job’s tribulation and restored his prosperity. Jehovah gave him double what he had before.” Job lived “a long and satisfying life.”—Job 42:10, 17.

<sup>14</sup> *The apostle Paul.* Are you facing bitter opposition, even persecution, from enemies of true worship? Are you a congregation elder or a circuit overseer who feels the weight of your heavy responsibilities? Meditate on the example

14. According to 2 Corinthians 1:6, how did the endurance of Paul help others?

of Paul. He faced numerous “things of an external kind” by vicious persecutors, and he felt daily pressure on account of his anxiety for the congregations. (2 Cor. 11:23-29) Yet, he refused to give up, and his example strengthened others. **(Read 2 Corinthians 1:6.)** When you endure hardship, remember that your example is likely encouraging others to endure.

### WILL ENDURANCE “COMPLETE ITS WORK” IN YOU?

<sup>15</sup> Under inspiration, James wrote: “Let endurance complete its work.” What “work” must endurance complete? It helps us to “be complete and sound in all respects, not lacking in anything.” (Jas. 1:4) Trials often reveal our weaknesses, aspects of our personality that we need to refine. If we endure those trials, however, our Christian personality becomes more complete, or sound. For example, we may become more patient, appreciative, and compassionate.

<sup>16</sup> Because endurance completes the vital work of molding us as Christians, do not compromise Scriptural principles to bring an end to tests that come your way. For instance, what if you struggle with unclean thoughts? Rather than give in to temptation, prayerfully reject such desires. You will thus fortify your self-control. Are you facing opposition from an unbelieving family member? Instead of yielding under pressure, be determined to maintain your pattern of wholehearted worship. Consequently, you will strengthen your confidence in Jehovah. Remember: To have God’s ap-

15, 16. (a) What “work” must endurance complete? (b) Give examples of how we can “let endurance complete its work.”

proval, we must endure.—Rom. 5:3-5; Jas. 1:12.

<sup>17</sup> We must endure, not for a time, but *to the end*. To illustrate: Imagine a ship that capsizes. To survive, the passengers must swim to shore. The swimmer who gives up only a few yards from shore faces the same fate as the swimmer who gave up much earlier. Similarly, we are determined to endure until we reach the new world. Our life depends on our enduring. We have an attitude like that of the apostle Paul, who twice stated: “We do not give up.”—2 Cor. 4:1, 16.

<sup>18</sup> We can be absolutely confident that Jehovah will help us endure to the end. We share Paul’s conviction as expressed at Romans 8:37-39: “We are coming off completely victorious through the one who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death nor life nor angels nor governments nor things now here nor things to come nor powers nor height nor depth nor any other creation will be able to separate us from God’s love that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” True, at times we will get tired. But may we endure to the end, so that it may be said of us as it was said of Gideon and his men: “They kept up the pursuit.”—Judg. 8:4.

17, 18. (a) Illustrate the importance of enduring to the end. (b) As we get closer to the end, what confidence can we have?

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### ENDNOTES:

[1] (paragraph 11) You will also find it encouraging to review the endurance of God’s people in modern times. For example, the *Yearbooks* of 1992, 1999, and 2008 contain the faith-strengthening reports of our brothers in Ethiopia, Malawi, and Russia.

[2] (paragraph 12) The Bible does not say how many cherubs were assigned to this task.





## Why Should We Meet Together for Worship?

*“They continued devoting themselves . . . to associating together.”—ACTS 2:42.*

SONGS: 20, 119

### USING THE BOX “REASONS TO ATTEND MEETINGS,” EXPLAIN . . .

how congregation meetings  
are good for us.

how we help others when we  
attend meetings.

how Jehovah feels when we  
attend meetings.

WHEN Corinna was only 17 years old, her mother was arrested and sent to a Soviet labor camp. Later, Corinna herself was exiled to Siberia, thousands of miles away from her home. Treated like a slave, she was sometimes forced to work outdoors in the bitter cold without adequate clothing. Despite those harsh conditions, Corinna and another sister were determined to attend a congregation meeting.

<sup>2</sup> “We left our work area in the evening,” she explains, “and walked to a railway station 15 miles (25 km) away. The train departed at two o’clock in the morning, and we rode for six hours before disembarking and walking six miles (10 km) to the meeting place.” Was the trip worth it? Corinna relates: “At the meeting, we studied *The Watchtower* and sang Kingdom songs. It was a very upbuilding and faith-strengthening experience for us.” Though they did not return to work until three days later, the farm manager did not even notice that Corinna and her companion had been away.

1-3. (a) How have Christians shown that they are eager to meet together? (See opening picture.) (b) What will we discuss in this article?

<sup>3</sup> Jehovah's people have always treasured occasions to meet together. Immediately after the Christian congregation was formed, followers of Jesus began "devoting themselves . . . to associating together." (Acts 2:42) You likely share their desire to attend congregation meetings regularly. Nevertheless, all Christians face obstacles. Secular work, a busy schedule, or fatigue because of our daily routine can make it difficult to attend meetings. What will motivate us to try to overcome these obstacles and maintain a healthy pattern of meeting attendance?<sup>[1]</sup> How can we help our Bible students and others to see the importance of attending meetings? In this article, we will consider eight reasons to meet together for worship. We can group those reasons into three categories: how you are affected, how others are affected, and how Jehovah is affected when you attend meetings.<sup>[2]</sup>

### HOW YOU ARE AFFECTED

<sup>4</sup> *Meetings educate us.* Every congregation meeting helps us to learn about our God, Jehovah. For example, over a recent period of almost two years, most congregations considered the book *Draw Close to Jehovah* at the Congregation Bible Study. Did not that study of God's qualities, along with the heartfelt comments of your brothers and sisters, strengthen your love for your heavenly Father? We also increase our knowledge of God's Word by paying careful attention to talks, demonstrations, and Bible readings. (Neh. 8:8) For instance, think of the spiritual gems you discover each week as you prepare for and listen to highlights from the Bible reading!

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4. How does meeting together help us to learn about Jehovah?

<sup>5</sup> Meetings teach us to apply Bible principles in all aspects of our life. (1 Thess. 4:9, 10) The *Watchtower* Study, for example, is tailored to the needs of God's people. Has a *Watchtower* Study motivated you to reevaluate your goals, to forgive a fellow Christian, or to improve the quality of your prayers? The midweek meeting educates us for the ministry. We learn how to preach the good news and how to teach Scriptural principles effectively.—Matt. 28:19, 20.

<sup>6</sup> *Meetings encourage us.* This system of things can weaken us mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. In contrast, congregation meetings encourage and strengthen us. **(Read Acts 15:30-32.)** At many of our meetings, we review the fulfillment of Bible prophecy. As a result, we reinforce our conviction that Jehovah's promises for the future will likewise be fulfilled. Of course, it is not just those who speak from the platform who encourage us. Fellow Christians who offer comments and sing from the heart also build us up. (1 Cor. 14:26) And when we converse with our brothers and sisters before and after the meetings, we feel a sense of belonging and enjoy true refreshment.—1 Cor. 16:17, 18.

<sup>7</sup> *Meetings bring us under the influence of holy spirit.* The glorified Jesus Christ said: "Let the one who has an ear hear what the spirit says to the congregations." (Rev. 2:7) Yes, Jesus leads the Christian congregation by means of holy

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5. How have meetings helped you to use what you learned from the Bible and to improve the way you preach?

6. How do our meetings encourage us and help us to keep strong?

7. Why is it so important to be at our meetings?

spirit. We need holy spirit to help us resist temptation, to embolden and equip us for the ministry, and to enable us to make sound decisions. Should we not take advantage of every provision—including congregation meetings—to receive that spirit?

### HOW OTHERS ARE AFFECTED

<sup>8</sup> *Meetings give us opportunities to show our brothers that we love them.* Think deeply about the challenges some brothers and sisters in your congregation must endure. No wonder the apostle Paul wrote: “Let us be concerned about one another”! Paul thereafter explained that we can show our concern by “not

8. When our brothers see us at the meetings and hear us comment and sing, how does this help them? (See also the box “He Always Leaves Feeling Better.”)

forsaking our meeting together.” (Heb. 10:24, 25; ftn.) Your presence at meetings shows that you deem your fellow worshippers worthy of your time, attention, and concern. In addition, your heartfelt comments and singing encourage your fellow Witnesses.—Col. 3:16.

<sup>9</sup> *Meetings unite us with fellow believers.* (Read **John 10:16.**) Jesus compared himself to a shepherd, and his followers to a flock of sheep. Consider: If two sheep are on a hill, two other sheep are in a valley, and still another sheep is grazing elsewhere, would we describe those five sheep as a flock? Generally, a flock of sheep stays together under the care of its shepherd. Similarly, we cannot follow our Shepherd if we deliberately isolate ourselves. We need to meet together with other Christians to be part of “one flock” under “one shepherd.”

<sup>10</sup> When we attend a meeting, we contribute to the unity of our brotherhood. (Ps. 133:1) Some of our fellow worshippers have been rejected by their parents and siblings. Yet, Jesus promised that he would give them a spiritual family to love them and care for them. (Mark 10:29, 30) When you attend meetings regularly, you may very well prove to be a father, mother, brother, or sister to one of these dear ones! Does that not motivate us to do our utmost to be at all the meetings?

### HOW JEHOVAH IS AFFECTED

<sup>11</sup> *Our meeting attendance gives Jehovah*

9, 10. (a) Explain how Jesus’ words found at John 10:16 help us to understand why it is important to meet with our brothers. (b) If we are at the meetings regularly, how can we help someone who has been rejected by his family?

11. How does attending meetings help us to give Jehovah what he deserves?

## HE ALWAYS LEAVES FEELING BETTER

“LATELY, I have been burdened with health problems that make it difficult to get to the meetings. But once I’m there, I can enjoy the wonderful spiritual meal that Jehovah has prepared. Even though I come with severe knee pain, heart problems, and complications from diabetes, I always leave the meeting feeling better than when I arrived.

“When I first heard song number 68, ‘A Prayer of the Lowly One,’ sung by our congregation, I was moved to tears. It was so beautiful! My hearing aids picked up everyone’s voice, and I sang along. Oh, how wonderful it felt to be there!”—George, age 58.



what he deserves. As our Creator, Jehovah deserves praise, glory, thanksgiving, and honor. **(Read Revelation 7:12.)** When we pray, sing, and speak about Jehovah at our meetings, we are giving him what he so richly deserves—our worship. We cherish the privilege to honor the One who has done so much for us.

<sup>12</sup> Jehovah also deserves our obedience. He has commanded us not to forsake our meeting together, especially during this time of the end. When we willingly obey that command, Jehovah is pleased. (1 John 3:22) He notices and values the effort we put forth to attend each meeting.—Heb. 6:10.

<sup>13</sup> *Our meeting attendance shows Jehovah that we want to draw close to him and his Son.* At our meetings, our Grand Instructor directs us through the pages of his Word, the Bible. (Isa. 30:20, 21) Even unbelievers who attend our meetings may conclude: “God is really among you.” (1 Cor. 14:23-25) Jehovah blesses meetings with his holy spirit and actively directs the Scriptural teaching program. At our meetings, then, we are listening to Jehovah’s voice and sensing his loving care. Consequently, we draw close to him.

<sup>14</sup> Jesus said: “Where there are two or three gathered together in my name, there I am in their midst.” (Matt. 18:20) In principle, Jesus’ statement applies to our meetings. As head of the congregation, Christ “walks among” the congregations of God’s people. (Rev. 1:20–2:1) Think of it! Jehovah and Jesus are actively involved in strengthening us at

12. How does Jehovah feel when we obey his command to attend meetings?

13, 14. How do we draw close to Jehovah and Jesus at meetings?

Christian meetings. How do you think Jehovah feels when he observes our eagerness to draw close to him and his Son?

<sup>15</sup> *Our meeting attendance demonstrates that we support God’s sovereignty.* Although Jehovah commands us to attend meetings, he does not force us to comply. (Isa. 43:23) Therefore, it is up to us to show Jehovah how deeply we love him from our heart and how firmly we support his rule. (Rom. 6:17) For example, we may be pressured by an employer who insists that we sacrifice regular meeting attendance for secular work. We may be opposed by a government that threatens us with fines, imprisonment, or worse if we meet together for worship. Or we may be tempted to engage in recreation rather than attend a meeting. In each of these situations, we face a choice: Whom will we serve? (Acts 5:29) When we choose to support Jehovah’s sovereignty, we make his heart rejoice.—Prov. 27:11.

### CONTINUE DEVOTING YOURSELF TO MEETING TOGETHER

<sup>16</sup> The early Christians did not simply meet together for a brief period following the stunning miracle at Pentecost 33 C.E. “They continued devoting themselves to the teaching of the apostles, to associating together.” (Acts 2:42) The Greek word translated “devoting themselves” implies enduring or persevering in a course with intense effort. Under Roman rule and faced with

15. How does going to meetings show God that we want to obey him?

16, 17. (a) How do we know that meetings were very important to Christians in the first century? (b) How did Brother George Gangas feel about Christian meetings?



## REASONS TO ATTEND MEETINGS

1. They educate us.
2. They encourage us.
3. They bring us under the influence of holy spirit.  
.....
4. They give us opportunities to show our brothers that we love them.
5. They unite us with fellow believers.  
.....
6. Our attendance gives Jehovah what he deserves.
7. Our attendance shows Jehovah that we want to draw close to him and his Son.
8. Our attendance demonstrates that we support God's sovereignty.

opposition by the Jewish religious leaders, those Christians did not find it easy to attend meetings. Nevertheless, they persevered.

<sup>17</sup> Many modern-day servants of Jehovah have shown deep appreciation for Christian meetings. George Gangas, who served on the Governing Body for over 22 years, stated: "To me, meeting with the brothers is one of life's greatest pleasures and a source of encouragement. I love to be at the Kingdom Hall among the first, and leave among the last, if possible. I feel an inward joy when talking with God's people. When I am among them I feel at home with my family, in a spiritual paradise." He added: "As the compass always points to the north, just so my innermost thought and desire is to attend the meetings."

<sup>18</sup> Do you feel the same way about gathering together to worship Jehovah? Then be determined to endure and persevere in your earnest efforts to attend meetings regularly. You will thus show that you agree with King David, who said: "Jehovah, I love the house where you dwell."—Ps. 26:8.

18. How do you feel about our meetings, and what are you determined to do?

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### ENDNOTES:

**[1]** (paragraph 3) Some of our fellow believers are unable to attend meetings regularly because of circumstances beyond their control, such as serious illness. They can be certain that Jehovah understands their situation and deeply appreciates their whole-souled worship. Elders may assist these infirm ones to benefit from spiritual programs, perhaps by helping them to tie in by telephone hookup or by recording the meetings for them.

**[2]** (paragraph 3) See the box "Reasons to Attend Meetings."



## Former Nuns Become True Spiritual Sisters

AS TOLD BY

FELISA AND ARACELI FERNÁNDEZ

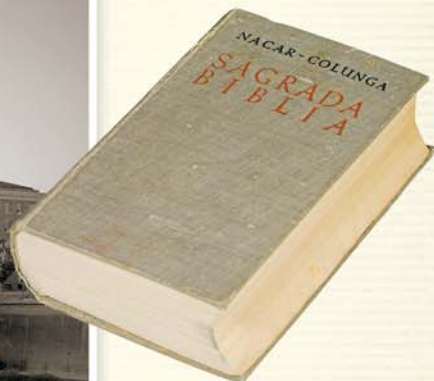
“STOP talking to me,” Araceli, my younger sister, shouted. “I don’t want to listen to anything else about your religion. It makes me feel sick. I hate you!” Even at 91 years of age, I can still remember how painful it was to hear those words. But as Ecclesiastes 7:8 says, “better is the end of a matter than its beginning,” and that was true in our case.—*Felisa*.

**Felisa:** I came from a very devout family. In fact, 13 of our relatives were priests or members of Catholic orders. Pope John Paul II even beatified my mother’s cousin, a priest who taught in a Catholic school. Ours was also a humble family. My father was a blacksmith, and my mother worked in the fields. I was the eldest of eight children.

When I was 12, the Spanish Civil War broke out. After the war, my father was imprisoned. His liberal ideas displeased the dictatorial government. My mother struggled to feed the family, so a friend recommended that she send my three younger sisters—Araceli, Lauri, and Ramoni—to a convent in Bilbao, Spain. At least they would not go hungry there.

**Araceli:** We were only 14, 12, and 10 years old at the time, and the separation from our family was very difficult. In Bilbao we did cleaning work. Two years later, the nuns transferred us to a large convent in Zaragoza that cared for elderly people. Our job was to clean the kitchen, exhausting work for young teenagers.

**Felisa:** When my sisters went to Zaragoza, my mother and the local priest, who was also my uncle, decided that I should go to work at the same convent. They thought that the move would keep me away from a local boy who was showing an interest in me. Since I was a very religious girl, I liked the idea of staying at a convent for a while. I used to attend Mass every day, and I had even



The convent in Zaragoza, Spain (left)  
Nácar-Colunga Bible translation (right)

thought of becoming a missionary like a cousin of mine who was a friar in Africa.

The nuns did nothing to encourage my desire to serve God in other lands, and I felt imprisoned by convent life. So a year later, I decided to return home to take care of my uncle, the priest. Besides doing housework, I recited the Rosary with him every evening. I also liked to arrange the church flowers and dress the images of the virgin and the “saints.”

**Araceli:** Meanwhile, our life in the convent changed. After I took my initial vows, the nuns decided to separate us girls. Ramoni stayed in Zaragoza, Lauri went to Valencia, and I was sent to Madrid, where I took my second set of vows. The Madrid convent provided lodgings for students, elderly people, and other visitors, so there was a tremendous amount of work to do. I worked in the convent infirmary.

Frankly, I expected the life of a nun to be more rewarding. I had looked forward to reading and understanding the Bible. But no one talked about God or Jesus, and we did not use the Bible. I just learned some Latin, studied the lives of the “saints,” and worshipped Mary. Everything else was hard physical labor.

I began to experience anxiety, and I talked to the mother superior. I told her that it did not make sense for me to work hard so that others could line their pockets while my family needed my help. She locked me in a cell, hoping that this would change my mind and deter me from leaving the convent.

On three occasions, the nuns released me, merely to see if I still wanted to leave. Because of my determination, they told me to state in writing, “I am leaving because I prefer to serve Satan rather than God.” That requirement shocked me, and although I was desperate to leave the convent, I could never write those words. Finally I asked for a confessor, and I told him what had happened. He arranged for the diocese to transfer me to my previous convent in Zaragoza. After a few months there, I was permitted to leave. Soon afterward, Lauri and Ramoni also left the convent.

#### A “FORBIDDEN” BOOK DIVIDES US

**Felisa:** In time, I married and moved to Cantabria. I still went to Mass regularly, and one Sunday I heard a startling announcement from the pulpit. The priest angrily shouted, “Look at this



book!” and pointed at the book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life*. He continued, “If someone has given you a copy, give it to me or throw it away!”

I did not have a copy, but I wanted one right away. As it happened, a few days later two Witnesses knocked on my door and offered me the “forbidden” book. That same night, I read it, and when the women returned, I agreed to study the Bible with them.

The truth soon touched my heart. My former religious devotion turned into a deep love for Jehovah and a zeal for the ministry. I got baptized in 1973. Although I had few opportunities to share the truth with my family, I did do so as much as I could. As I explained at the outset, they vigorously opposed my beliefs, especially my sister Araceli.

**Araceli:** My negative experiences in the convent had made me bitter. However, I kept on attending Mass on Sundays, and I daily recited the Rosary. I still had an intense desire to understand the Bible, and I asked God to help me. But when my sister Felisa talked to me about her new-found beliefs, she sounded so passionate that I thought she was a fanatic. I strongly disagreed with her.

After a few years, I returned to Madrid for work and I got married. In time, I became very skeptical. I noticed that people who regularly attended Mass did not practice the teachings of the Gospels. So I stopped going to church. I no longer believed in “saints,” in confession, or in hell-fire. And I even got rid of all my images. I did not know whether I was doing the right thing. I felt disappointed, but I kept praying to God: “I want to get to know you. Help me!” I remember that Jehovah’s Witnesses called at my home on several occasions, but I never opened the door. I did not trust any religion.

In the early 1980’s, my sisters Lauri and Ramoni, who were living in France and Spain



Felisa



The “forbidden” book



Araceli



respectively, started to study the Bible with the Witnesses. I assumed that they had been misled, as Felisa had been. Later, I met a neighbor, Angelines, who became a close friend. She too was one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Time and again, Angelines and her husband asked me to study the Bible. They perceived that behind my facade of skepticism was a thirst for Bible knowledge. Eventually, I told them: "All right. I will agree to study with you but only if I can use my own Bible," referring to my Nacar-Colunga Bible translation.

### THE BIBLE FINALLY UNITES US

**Felisa:** When I got baptized in 1973, there were about 70 Witnesses in the city of Santander, the capital of the province of Cantabria, Spain. We had a vast territory, so we traveled by bus and later by car to preach throughout the province. We went from village to village until we had visited the hundreds of villages in the region.

Over the years, I have had the privilege of conducting many Bible studies, and 11 of the students got baptized. Most of them were Catholic. Because I had once been a fervent believer myself, I knew I had to be patient and understanding. I realized that they needed time to let go of strongly held beliefs and that the Bible and Jehovah's holy spirit had to touch their hearts to help them identify the truth. (Heb. 4:12) My husband, Bienvenido, who had been a policeman, got baptized in 1979, and my mother began to study the Bible shortly before she died.

**Araceli:** I was very suspicious when I started to study the Bible with the Witnesses. But as the weeks went by, I noticed that my feelings of bitterness vanished. What impressed me most about the Witnesses was that they practiced what they preached. Faith replaced skepticism, and I felt much happier. Even some neighbors told me, "Araceli, keep going on the way you have chosen!"

I remember praying, "Thank you, Jehovah, for not giving up on me and for giving me so many opportunities to find what I was looking for—the true knowledge of the Bible." I asked my sister Felisa to forgive me for the hurtful words I had spoken to her. Our arguments were replaced with lively Bible discussions. I got baptized in 1989 at the age of 61.

**Felisa:** Now at the age of 91, I am a widow and do not have the strength I once had. But I do read the Bible every day, attend meetings when my health permits, and enjoy participating in the ministry as much as I can.

**Araceli:** Possibly because I was a nun, I like to give a witness to all the priests and nuns I meet in the ministry. I have left many publications with them and have had some interesting conversations. I recall one priest who, after several visits, told me: "Araceli, I wholly agree with you, but where could I go at my age? What would my parishioners and my family say?" I replied: "And what will God say?" He nodded sadly, but at the time, he did not have the courage to continue searching for the truth.

I remember a special moment in my life. It was when my husband first said he wanted to accompany me to a meeting. Although he was over 80 years old at the time, he never missed a meeting after that. He studied the Bible and became an unbaptized publisher. I have fond memories of us going in the ministry together. He died two months before the day he was going to get baptized.

**Felisa:** One of the greatest satisfactions in my life has been seeing my three younger sisters, who initially opposed me, become my spiritual sisters. How much we have enjoyed being together, talking about our dear God, Jehovah, and his Word! Finally, my sisters and I are united spiritually.\*

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\* Araceli, Felisa, and Ramoni—87, 91, and 83 years old respectively—continue to serve Jehovah zealously down to this day. Lauri passed away in 1990, faithful to Jehovah.



## Maintain Your Neutrality in a Divided World

*“Pay back . . . God’s things to God.”—MATT. 22:21.*

GOD’S WORD tells us to be obedient to human governments, yet it also teaches that we must obey God rather than men. (Acts 5:29; Titus 3:1) Is this a contradiction? Not at all! The principle of relative subjection helps us to understand and obey these commands. Jesus summarized this principle when he said: “Pay back, therefore, Caesar’s things to Caesar, but God’s things to God.”<sup>[1]</sup> (Matt. 22:21) How do we follow Jesus’ direction? We submit to the authority of the government under which we live by obeying its laws, respecting its officials, and paying the taxes it levies. (Rom. 13:7) However, if government authorities tell us to disobey God, we respectfully refuse to comply.

<sup>2</sup> We pay back to God what is rightfully his, in part, by remaining neutral in the world’s political affairs. (Isa. 2:4) Thus, we do not oppose human governments that Jehovah allows to function; nor do we promote patriotic or nationalistic activity. (Rom. 13:1, 2) We do not lobby, vote

1. How can we obey both God and human governments?
2. How do we show that we do not take sides in the world’s politics?

SONGS: 33, 137

### CAN YOU ANSWER?

What does Jehovah think about human governments?

What should we do when it becomes difficult to stay neutral?

What can we learn from faithful servants of Jehovah who stayed neutral?



in political elections, run for government office, or try to change governments.

<sup>3</sup> The Bible gives several reasons why God requires that we remain neutral. For example, we follow the teachings and example of his Son, Jesus Christ, by being “no part of the world,” avoiding its politics and wars. (John 6:15; 17:16) We must remain neutral in order to be loyal subjects of God’s Kingdom. Otherwise, how could we have a clean conscience when we preach the good news that only God’s Kingdom can solve mankind’s problems? Additionally, unlike false religions that divide their members by meddling in politics, true worship preserves our international brotherhood by helping us to remain neutral.—1 Pet. 2:17.

<sup>4</sup> Where we live, the political environment may be calm, seemingly tolerant of true worship. Yet, as Satan’s system nears its end, we can expect the issue of neutrality to become more prominent. The world is filled with people who are “not open to any agreement” and “headstrong,” so it will only become more divided and polarized. (2 Tim. 3: 3, 4) In some countries, our brothers have already faced unexpected challenges to their neutrality because of a rapidly changing political environment. Do you see why we need to strengthen our resolve now to remain neutral? If we wait until we face a challenging situation, we might compromise and violate our neutral stand. So how can we pre-

pare to maintain our neutrality in a divided world? Let us consider four keys that will help us to succeed.

#### VIEW HUMAN GOVERNMENTS AS JEHOVAH DOES

<sup>5</sup> A first key to remaining neutral is to share Jehovah’s view of political systems. Although some governments might appear to be just, the very concept of humans ruling over other humans was never Jehovah’s purpose. (Jer. 10:23) Man-made governments promote nationalism, which divides the human family. Even the best human leaders are unable to solve all problems. In addition, since 1914, human governments have become rivals to God’s Kingdom, which will soon execute judgment on the nations by destroying them.—**Read Psalm 2:2, 7-9.**

<sup>6</sup> God lets the world’s political structure remain because it provides a measure of stability that, in turn, helps us to preach the good news of the Kingdom. (Rom. 13:3, 4) God even directs us to pray concerning those in authority, especially when their decisions might affect our worship. (1 Tim. 2:1, 2) We appeal to government authorities for fair treatment, as the apostle Paul did. (Acts 25:11) Although the Bible teaches that God’s adversary, Satan, has authority over political systems, it does not say that he directly controls each leader or official. (Luke 4:5, 6) We should therefore avoid implying that a particular official is controlled by the Devil. Instead, when dealing with “governments

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3. Why must we remain neutral?

4. (a) How do we know that it will become more difficult to remain neutral? (b) Why should we prepare now to remain neutral?

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5. What does Jehovah think about human governments?

6. How should we treat those who have authority in the government?



and authorities,” we “speak injuriously of no one.”—Titus 3:1, 2.

<sup>7</sup> We obey God by never favoring any candidate or political party over another, regardless of whether they seem to support or oppose our interests. How might our neutrality be tested in this regard? Suppose that a popular uprising tries to oust an oppressive regime, one under which God’s people have also suffered. Although we would not march with the protesters, might we be with them in spirit? (Eph. 2:2) We must remain neutral not only in our words and actions but also in our heart.

#### BE “CAUTIOUS” YET “INNOCENT”

<sup>8</sup> A second key to maintaining our neutrality is to be “cautious as serpents and yet innocent as doves” when facing challenges. **(Read Matthew 10:16, 17.)** We show caution by recognizing dangers early, and we remain innocent by not letting them lead us into compromise. Consider some potential challenges and how we can deal with them.

<sup>9</sup> *Conversations.* We must exercise caution when political issues are brought up. For example, when presenting the Kingdom message, avoid either praising or criticizing the policies of a political party or leader. Try to establish common ground with the householder by focusing on the underlying problem rather than on any proposed political solution. Then, show from the Bible how God’s government will solve the problem completely and perma-

nently. If such volatile issues as same-sex marriage or abortion come up, defend God’s standards and explain how we follow these in our own lives. During the discussion, remain strictly neutral on the political aspects of these topics. We take no position regarding what laws should be enacted, repealed, or changed, and we do not pressure others to agree with our view.

<sup>10</sup> *The media.* Information broadcast as “news” is often presented in a biased and opinionated way. The media sometimes functions as a tool of the political system. News reports might be blatantly slanted in lands with State-controlled media, yet even Christians living in so-called free countries must be careful not to adopt the bias of a commentator. Ask yourself, ‘Do I enjoy listening to someone in the media because I agree with his political leaning?’ If so, you might look for a more objective source of information. In any case, it is wise to limit your intake from media sources that promote a political agenda and to test what you hear against “the standard of wholesome words” found in the Bible.—2 Tim. 1:13.

<sup>11</sup> *Materialism.* If we are attached to our possessions, we risk compromising our neutrality when we are under test. Ruth, in Malawi, saw several Witnesses do so when they were persecuted in the 1970’s. She recalls: “They could not give up their comfortable life. Some went into exile with us but later joined the

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7. What thinking must we avoid?

8. When it is difficult to remain neutral, how can we be “cautious” yet “innocent”?

9. What must we be careful of when talking to others?

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10. How can we make sure that we remain neutral when we watch or read anything in the media?

11. How might it be hard for us to remain neutral when the things we own are very important to us?

political party and returned home because they did not want to put up with the discomforts of life in the refugee camp.” In contrast, the vast majority of God’s people have remained neutral despite economic pressures or even the loss of everything they own.—Heb. 10:34.

<sup>12</sup> *Undue pride.* People often tout the merits of their race, tribe, culture, city, or nation. However, we know that taking undue pride in tribe, culture, or nation puts us at odds with Jehovah’s view of human rule and the human family. Of course, God does not expect us to renounce our culture. In fact, cultural differences illustrate the marvelous diversity of the human family. Still, we must remember that in God’s sight, all people are equal.—Rom. 10:12.

<sup>13</sup> Taking undue pride in our place of origin is at the heart of nationalism and could be the first step on a path to compromise. Christians are not immune to such pride, for even some in the first-century congregation discriminated against their brothers because of their nationality. (Acts 6:1) How can we tell if undue pride is taking root in us? Suppose a brother or sister from another land offered you a suggestion. Would you reject it, immediately thinking, ‘We do things better around here’? Instead, we should all apply the inspired counsel: “With humility consider others superior to you.”—Phil. 2:3.

### GAIN STRENGTH FROM JEHOVAH

<sup>14</sup> A third key to maintaining our neu-

12, 13. (a) What does Jehovah think about humans? (b) How can we tell if we are becoming too proud of our country?

14. How can prayer help us, and what Bible example proves this?

trality is to gain strength from Jehovah. Pray for holy spirit, which can give you patience and self-control, qualities needed to cope with a government that may be corrupt or unjust. You can also ask Jehovah for the wisdom to recognize and deal with situations that could cause you to violate your Christian neutrality. (Jas. 1:5) If you are imprisoned or otherwise punished because of your resolute stand for true worship, pray for the strength to defend your faith with boldness and to endure whatever persecution may come.—**Read Acts 4: 27-31.**

<sup>15</sup> Jehovah can strengthen you by means of his Word. Meditate on verses that will help you maintain your neutrality under test. Commit them to memory now, so that they can sustain you if you do not have access to a Bible later. God’s Word can also reinforce your hope in future Kingdom blessings. This hope is essential if we are to endure persecution. (Rom. 8:25) Select passages that describe blessings that you especially hope to enjoy, and visualize yourself experiencing those blessings in Paradise.

### BENEFIT FROM OTHER INTEGRITY-KEEPERS

<sup>16</sup> Faithful servants of Jehovah provide the fourth key to maintaining neutrality. Their examples can give us the wisdom and strength we need to endure. For instance, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego refused to wor-

15. How can the Bible help us to remain neutral? (See also the box “God’s Word Strengthened Their Conviction.”)

16, 17. What can we learn from the examples of God’s faithful servants who remained neutral? (See opening picture.)

## GOD'S WORD Strengthened Their Conviction

“Meditating on Proverbs 27:11, Matthew 26:52, and John 13:35 strengthened my conviction to refuse military service. These verses also helped me to remain calm during my trial.”—*Andriy, from Ukraine.*

“Isaiah 2:4 helped me to remain neutral under test. I pictured in my mind the quietness of life in the new world, when no one will carry a weapon to harm his neighbor.”—*Wilmer, from Colombia.*

ship an image representing the Babylonian State. **(Read Daniel 3:16-18.)** Reading about their determination has given Witnesses today the courage to refuse to worship the flag of the nation in which they live. Also, Jesus stayed completely separate from the political and social conflicts of the world. Noting the effect that his example would have on others, he urged his disciples: “Take courage! I have conquered the world.”—John 16:33.

<sup>17</sup> Many Witnesses in modern times have maintained their neutrality. Some have suffered physical abuse and imprisonment and have even died for their faith. Their examples can help you as they did Barış, from Turkey, who said: “Franz Reiter was a young brother who was executed because he refused to join Hitler’s army. The letter he wrote to his mother the night before he died showed

tremendous faith and confidence in Jehovah, and I wanted to follow his example if I faced such a trial.”<sup>[2]</sup>

<sup>18</sup> Support also comes from the brothers and sisters in your congregation. Let the elders know about the tests of neutrality that you may be facing, and ask for their mature, Bible-based counsel. Members of the congregation will encourage you if they are aware of the challenges you are facing. Ask them to pray in your behalf. Of course, if we want our brothers to support us and pray for us, we should do the same for them. (Matt. 7:12) The jw.org article “Jehovah’s Witnesses Imprisoned for Their Faith—By Location” posted under NEWSROOM > LEGAL DEVELOPMENTS can help you to be specific in your prayers. It includes links to lists of Witnesses currently imprisoned for their faith. Pick some names, and pray that such ones courageously maintain their integrity.—Eph. 6:19, 20.

<sup>19</sup> As human governments near their end, we will not be surprised if they become less and less tolerant of our loyalty to Jehovah and his Kingdom. Thus, may we now strengthen our resolve to maintain our neutrality in a divided world.

18, 19. (a) How can the members of your congregation help you to remain neutral? (b) What are you determined to do?

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### ENDNOTES:

[1] (paragraph 1) Jesus here used Caesar, the highest-ranking human ruler at the time, as a symbol of the civil authority, or State.

[2] (paragraph 17) See *Jehovah’s Witnesses—Proclaimers of God’s Kingdom*, p. 662, and the box “He Died for God’s Honor” on p. 150 in the book *God’s Kingdom Rules!*

*What are the “token” and the “seal” that each anointed Christian receives from God?—2 Cor. 1:21, 22; ftn.*

■ **Token:** According to one reference work, the Greek term translated “token” at 2 Corinthians 1:22 was “a legal and commercial technical term” meaning “first instalment, deposit, down payment, pledge, that pays a part of the purchase price in advance, and so secures a legal claim to the article in question, or makes a contract valid.” In the case of anointed ones, the full payment, or reward, is described at 2 Corinthians 5:1-5 as involving the putting on of an incorruptible heavenly body. The reward also includes receiving the gift of immortality.—1 Cor. 15:48-54.

In modern Greek, a related expression is used for an engagement ring. This is a fitting illustration for those who will become part of Christ’s figurative wife.—2 Cor. 11:2; Rev. 21:2, 9.

■ **Seal:** In the past, a seal was used as a signature to prove ownership, authenticity, or agreement. In the case of the anointed, they are “sealed,” or branded, figuratively by holy spirit as God’s possession. (Eph. 1:13, 14) This seal is not made permanent, though, until either sometime before the person dies faithful or sometime before the outbreak of the great tribulation.—Eph. 4:30; Rev. 7:2-4.



In the past, a seal ring was pressed into clay or wax to authenticate a document

