

DECEMBER 1, 2001

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



THE GOLDEN RULE

Is It Still Practical?

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

December 1, 2001

Average Printing Each Issue: 23,042,000

Vol. 122, No. 23

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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Publication of *The Watchtower* is part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. The Bible translation used is the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures—With References*, unless otherwise indicated.

The Watchtower (ISSN 0043-1087) is published semimonthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; M. H. Larson, President; G. F. Simonis, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, NY, and at additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to Watchtower, Wallkill, NY 12589.

Changes of address should reach us 30 days before your moving date. Give us your old and new address (if possible, your old address label).

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Semimonthly

ENGLISH

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THE GOLDEN RULE

A Universal Teaching

"All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them."—Matthew 7:12.

THOSE words were spoken nearly two thousand years ago by Jesus Christ in his famous Sermon on the Mount. In the centuries since, much has been said and written about that simple statement. Among other things, it has been extolled as "the very essence of Scripture," "a summary of the Christian's duty to his neighbour," and "a fundamental ethical principle." So well-known has it become that it is often referred to as the Golden Rule.

The idea of the Golden Rule, however, is by no means confined to the so-called Christian world. Judaism, Buddhism, and Greek philosophy all expounded this ethical maxim in one form or another. Well-known, especially to people in the Far East, is a statement by Confucius, who is venerated in the Orient as the greatest sage and teacher. In *The Analects*, the third of the Confucian *Four Books*, we find the thought expressed three times. Twice, in answer to queries from students, Confucius stated: "What you do not want done

to you, do not do to others." On another occasion, when his pupil Zigong boasted "What I do not want others to do to me, I also do not want to do to them," the teacher responded with this sobering rejoinder, "Yes, but this you are not yet able to do."

Reading these words, one can see that Confucius' statement is a negative version of what Jesus later said. The obvious difference is that the Golden Rule stated by Jesus requires positive actions of doing good to others. Suppose people were to act in harmony with Jesus' positive statement, caring about and taking steps to help others, living by this code daily. Do you think that would make today's world a better place? Undoubtedly.

Whether the rule is stated in the positive, the negative, or any other form, what is significant is that people in different times and places and with diverse backgrounds have put much stock in the idea of the Golden Rule. This simply shows that what Jesus stated in the Sermon on the Mount is a universal teaching that touches the life of people everywhere in every age.



Confucius and others taught variations of the Golden Rule

Ask yourself: 'Would I like to be treated respectfully, fairly, honestly? Would I like to live in a world without racial prejudice, crime, and war? Would I like to be in a family in which everyone showed concern for the feelings and welfare of others?' Actually, who would say no to such possibilities? The grim reality is that very few enjoy these conditions. For most people, it is almost too much to hope for such things.

Golden Rule Tarnished

Throughout history, there have been cases of crimes against humanity in which the rights of people were totally ignored. These include the slave trade out of Africa, Nazi death camps, forced child labor, and brutal genocides in one place or another. The horrifying list could be much longer.

Today, our high-tech world is self-centered. Few people think about others when their own convenience or supposed rights are at stake. (2 Timothy 3:1-5) Why have so many become selfish, cruel, unfeeling, and self-centered? Is it not because the Golden Rule, though still widely known, is being brushed aside as unrealistic, a moral relic? Sadly, this is the case even among many who claim to believe in God. And judging by the way things are going, people will only become more self-centered.

Therefore, the vital questions that must be considered are: What does living by the Golden Rule involve? Does anyone still live by it? And will there ever be a time when all mankind will live in harmony with the Golden Rule? For the truthful answers to these questions, please read the following article.

THE GOLDEN RULE It Is Practical

While most people view the Golden Rule as a moral teaching enunciated by Jesus, he himself stated: "What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me."—John 7:16.

YES, the Originator of what Jesus taught, including what came to be known as the Golden Rule, is the one who sent Jesus, namely, the Creator, Jehovah God.

God originally purposed that all mankind treat one another as they would like to be treated. He set the finest example in expressing care for the welfare of others

in the way he created humans: "God proceeded to create the man in his image, in God's image he created him; male and female he created them." (Genesis 1:27) This means that God lovingly endowed humans with a measure of his own outstanding qualities so that they could enjoy life in peace, happiness, and harmony—potentially forever. Their God-given

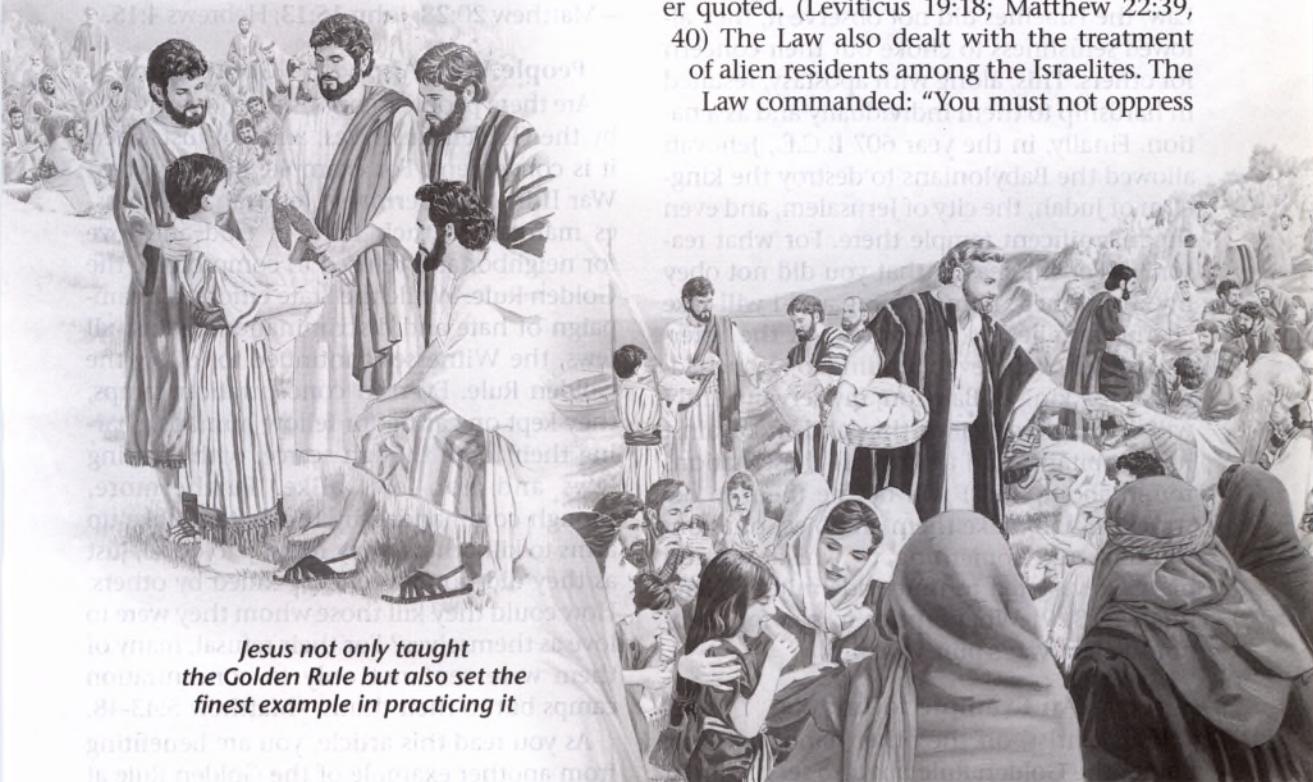
conscience, when properly trained, would guide them to treat others the way they themselves would want to be treated.

Selfishness Took Over

Since mankind had such a wonderful start, what happened? Simply stated, selfishness made its ugly appearance. Most people are familiar with the Bible's account of what the first human couple did, as recorded in Genesis chapter 3. Urged on by Satan, an opposer to all that God stands for, Adam and Eve selfishly rejected God's rulership in preference to independence and self-determination. Their selfish and rebellious action resulted not only in great loss to themselves but also in tragic consequences for all their future offspring. That was a clear demonstration of the dire re-

sult of ignoring the teaching that came to be known as the Golden Rule. Consequently, "through one man sin entered into the world and death through sin, and thus death spread to all men because they had all sinned."—Romans 5:12.

Though mankind as a whole turned their back on the loving ways of Jehovah God, he did not abandon them. For example, Jehovah gave the nation of Israel his Law to guide them. It taught them to treat others as they themselves would want to be treated. The Law gave direction on treatment of slaves, fatherless boys, and widows. It outlined how assault, kidnapping, and stealing were to be dealt with. Sanitary laws showed concern for the health of others. There were even laws on sexual matters. Jehovah epitomized his Law by telling the people: "You must love your fellow as yourself," a statement that Jesus later quoted. (Leviticus 19:18; Matthew 22:39, 40) The Law also dealt with the treatment of alien residents among the Israelites. The Law commanded: "You must not oppress



*Jesus not only taught
the Golden Rule but also set the
finest example in practicing it*

an alien resident, as you yourselves have known the soul of the alien resident, because you became alien residents in the land of Egypt." In other words, the Israelites were to show empathetic kindness to the disadvantaged.—Exodus 23:9; Leviticus 19:34; Deuteronomy 10:19.

As long as Israel faithfully followed the Law, Jehovah blessed the nation. Under the reigns of David and Solomon, the nation prospered and the people were happy and satisfied. A historical account tells us: "Judah and Israel were many, like the grains of sand that are by the sea for multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. And Judah and Israel continued to dwell in security, everyone under his own vine and under his own fig tree." —1 Kings 4:20, 25.

Sadly, the peace and security of the nation did not last long. Though having God's Law, the Israelites did not observe it; they allowed selfishness to choke out their concern for others. This, along with apostasy, resulted in hardship to them individually and as a nation. Finally, in the year 607 B.C.E., Jehovah allowed the Babylonians to destroy the kingdom of Judah, the city of Jerusalem, and even the magnificent temple there. For what reason? "'For the reason that you did not obey my words, here I am sending and I will take all the families of the north,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'even sending to Nebuchadrezzar the king of Babylon, my servant, and I will bring them against this land and against its inhabitants and against all these nations round about; and I will devote them to destruction and make them an object of astonishment and something to whistle at and places devastated to time indefinite!'" (Jeremiah 25:8, 9) What a price to pay for abandoning Jehovah's pure worship!

An Example to Imitate

Jesus Christ, on the other hand, not only taught the Golden Rule but also set the finest

example in following it. He genuinely cared for the welfare of others. (Matthew 9:36; 14:14; Luke 5:12, 13) Once, near the city of Nain, Jesus saw a heartbroken widow in a funeral procession for her only son. The Bible account says: "When the Lord caught sight of her, he was moved with pity for her." (Luke 7:11-15) The expression "moved with pity," according to *Vine's Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words*, denotes "to be moved as to one's inwards." He felt her pain of heart, and it moved him to take positive steps to relieve her pain. What joy it brought that widow when Jesus resurrected the boy and "gave him to his mother"!

Finally, in harmony with God's purpose, Jesus willingly suffered and gave his life as a ransom so that mankind could be freed from slavery under sin and death. This was the ultimate example of *living* by the Golden Rule. —Matthew 20:28; John 15:13; Hebrews 4:15.

People Who Apply the Golden Rule

Are there people in our time who really live by the Golden Rule? Yes, and not just when it is convenient. For example, during World War II in Nazi Germany, Jehovah's Witnesses maintained their faith in God and love for neighbor and refused to compromise the Golden Rule. While the State enforced a campaign of hate and discrimination against all Jews, the Witnesses continued to follow the Golden Rule. Even in concentration camps, they kept on caring for fellow humans, sharing their food, though scarce, with starving Jews and non-Jews alike. Furthermore, though commanded by the State to take up arms to kill others, they refused to do so, just as they did not desire to be killed by others. How could they kill those whom they were to love as themselves? For their refusal, many of them were sent not only to concentration camps but to their death.—Matthew 5:43-48.

As you read this article, you are benefiting from another example of the Golden Rule at



Following the Golden Rule can lead to true peace and security

work. Jehovah's Witnesses realize that today many people suffer hopelessly and helplessly. Because of this, the Witnesses voluntarily take positive action to help others to learn about the hope and the practical direction found in the Bible. It is all part of a global educational work now being done on an unprecedented scale. The result? As prophesied at Isaiah 2:2-4, "many peoples," in fact over six million individuals around the world, have been 'instructed in Jehovah's ways and walk in his paths.' Figuratively, they have learned "to beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning shears." They have found peace and security in these troublesome times.

What About You?

Reflect for a moment on the agony and suffering that disregard for the Golden Rule has brought on mankind since the rebellion in Eden, instigated by Satan the Devil. Jehovah purposes to reverse the situation soon. How? "For this purpose the Son of God was made manifest, namely, to break up the works of the Devil." (1 John 3:8) This will occur un-



der the reign of God's Kingdom, in the wise and capable hands of Jesus Christ, the one who taught and lived by the Golden Rule.
—Psalm 37:9-11; Daniel 2:44.

King David of ancient Israel observed: "A young man I used to be, I have also grown old, and yet I have not seen anyone righteous left entire-

ly, nor his offspring looking for bread. All day long he is showing favor and lending, and so his offspring are in line for a blessing." (Psalm 37:25, 26) Would you not agree that most people today are taking and grabbing rather than "showing favor and lending"? Clearly, following the Golden Rule can lead to true peace and security because it puts one in line for blessings now and in the future under God's Kingdom. God's Kingdom will do away with every last vestige of selfishness and wickedness on earth and replace the present system of corrupt man-made rule with a new system of God's making. Then, all people will enjoy living by the Golden Rule.—Psalm 29:11; 2 Peter 3:13.

"You've Dialed the Wrong Number"

In Johannesburg, South Africa, Leslie and Caroline were taking turns in witnessing by telephone to people living in a retirement village that had controlled access. They found few at home and little interest in their Christian message, so Caroline was encouraged when a lady answered.

"Is that Mrs. B-?" asked Caroline.

"Oh, no," said a friendly voice, "I'm Mrs. G-. You've dialed the wrong number."

Noting the warmth in her voice, Caroline said: "Well, let me explain what I wanted to tell Mrs. B-." She then proceeded to talk about the blessings of God's incoming Kingdom. After arrangements had been made to drop off the brochure *What Does God Require of Us?*, Mrs. G- asked: "By the way, what religion are you?"

"We're Jehovah's Witnesses," Caroline answered.

"Oh, no, not *that* religion! I don't think I want to see you."

"But Mrs. G-," appealed Caroline, "for the past 20 minutes, I have shared the most wonderful hope with you, pointing out from the Bible what God's Kingdom will shortly do for mankind. You were so happy to hear these things—even excited—and wanted to learn more. What do you really know about Jehovah's Witnesses? If you were sick, would you go to a mechanic? Why not let *me* tell you what Jehovah's Witnesses believe?"

After a moment of silence came the response: "I suppose you're right. You'd better come. But mind you, you will *never* convert me!"

"Mrs. G-, I could never convert you even



if I wanted to," Caroline replied. "Only Jehovah can do that."

The visit to deliver the brochure went well, and Mrs. G- (Betty) agreed to another call. When Caroline returned, Betty said that she had told the ladies at her table that she was having discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses. "How could you?" they had asked, throwing their hands in the air. "Those people don't even believe in Jesus!"

Caroline immediately reminded Betty of a main point from their last discussion about God's Kingdom.

"Who will be the King?" Caroline asked.

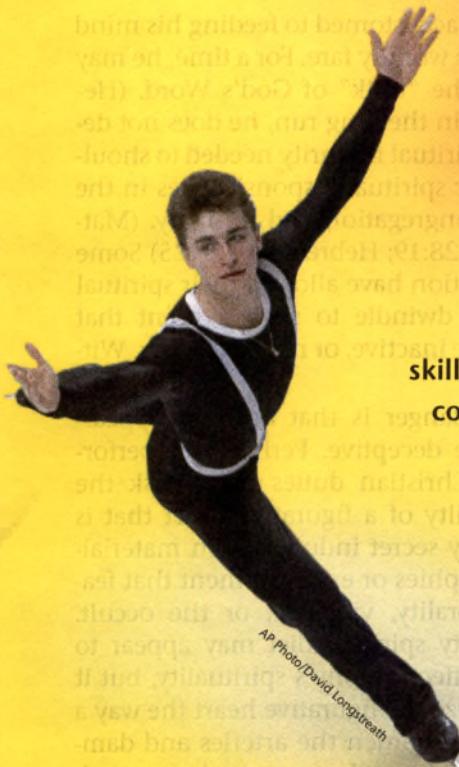
"Why, Jesus," answered Betty.

"Of course," said Caroline. She then went on to explain that Jehovah's Witnesses believe that Jesus is God's Son, but he is not equal to God as part of a Trinity.—Mark 13:32; Luke 22:42; John 14:28.

After a few more visits, it became obvious that although she had a positive, happy spirit, Betty was suffering from poor health. In fact, she had cancer and was afraid of dying. "I wish I had heard these things years ago and had your faith," she confessed. Caroline comforted her by showing her scriptures describing death as a deep sleep from which one could rise in the resurrection. (John 11:11, 25) This meant much to Betty, who now enjoys a regular Bible study. Only her deteriorating health has prevented her from attending meetings at the Kingdom Hall.

Observes Caroline: "It's obvious to me that the angels are directing this work. Betty was a 'wrong number,' and just think, she's 89 years old!"—Revelation 14:6.

You Can Avoid a Spiritual Heart Attack



AP Photo/David Longstreath

A world-class athlete, in full command of his skill and to all outward appearances in excellent physical condition, suddenly collapsed during a practice session and died. The athlete was Sergei Grinkov, a two-time

Olympic gold medalist ice skater, whose career was cut short just as it started to blossom—when he was only 28 years old. What a tragedy! The cause? A heart attack. It was said that his death was totally unexpected because there was no sign of any kind to indicate that he was suffering from heart disease.

Yet, examiners found that he had an enlarged heart and severely blocked coronary arteries.

WHILE it may appear that many heart attacks occur without warning, medical authorities say that it is rarely the case. The truth is that such tell-tale signs and contributing factors as breathlessness, overweight, and chest pains are often ignored. As a result, even if death does not claim them as victims at the time of their heart attack, many become severely handicapped for the rest of their lives.

The consensus of medical opinion today is that prevention of a heart attack requires constant vigilance in one's diet and life-style and regular medical checkups.* Such mea-

sures, along with a genuine willingness to make changes where necessary, will go a long way in sparing one the tragic effects of a heart attack.

There is, however, another aspect of our heart that merits even more attention. "More than all else that is to be guarded, safeguard your heart," the Bible warns us, "for out of it are the sources of life." (Proverbs 4:23) This scripture, of course, is referring principally to the figurative heart. Vigilance is needed to safeguard our physical heart, but it is even more important to remain on the alert if we

* For further information, please see the series "Heart Attack—What Can Be Done?" in the December 8, 1996, issue of *Awake!*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

want to protect our figurative heart against diseases that can lead to spiritual death.

Anatomy of a Figurative Heart Attack

As with physical heart disease, one of the surest ways to prevent a heart attack spiritually speaking is to learn of its causes and then take steps to do something about them. So let us consider some of the basic factors that contribute to problems of the heart—literal and figurative.

Diet. It is generally accepted that junk food, though appealing to the palate, offers little or no health benefits. Similarly, mental junk food is readily available and tantalizing

A FAULTY SPIRITUAL DIET COULD
PARALYZE THE FIGURATIVE HEART THE WAY
A POOR DIET CAN HARDEN THE ARTERIES
AND DAMAGE THE LITERAL HEART

to the senses, but it is detrimental to one's spiritual health. Cleverly marketed in the media is a profusion of material that features illicit sex and drugs, violence, and the occult. Feeding one's mind on such a diet is deadly to the figurative heart. God's Word warns: "Everything in the world—the desire of the flesh and the desire of the eyes and the showy display of one's means of life—does not originate with the Father, but originates with the world. Furthermore, the world is passing away and so is its desire, but he that does the will of God remains forever."

—1 John 2:16, 17.

Healthful foods, like fruits and green vegetables, offer little appeal to a junk-food addict. Likewise, wholesome and solid spiritual food may have little appeal to a person who

has become accustomed to feeding his mind and heart on worldly fare. For a time, he may subsist on the "milk" of God's Word. (Hebrews 5:13) In the long run, he does not develop the spiritual maturity needed to shoulder his basic spiritual responsibilities in the Christian congregation and ministry. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19; Hebrews 10:24, 25) Some in that situation have allowed their spiritual strength to dwindle to such a point that they become inactive, or nonpracticing, Witnesses!

Another danger is that outward appearance can be deceptive. Perfunctory performance of Christian duties may mask the growing frailty of a figurative heart that is weakened by secret indulgence in materialistic philosophies or entertainment that features immorality, violence, or the occult. Such a faulty spiritual diet may appear to have little effect on one's spirituality, but it could paralyze the figurative heart the way a poor diet can harden the arteries and damage the literal heart. Jesus warned against allowing improper desires to enter one's heart. He said: "Everyone that keeps on looking at a woman so as to have a passion for her has already committed adultery with her in his

A SPIRITUALLY SEDENTARY LIFE-STYLE CAN
HAVE SERIOUS CONSEQUENCES

heart." (Matthew 5:28) Yes, a poor spiritual diet can lead to a spiritual heart attack. Yet, there are further concerns.

Exercise. It is well-known that a sedentary life-style can contribute to physical heart attacks. Similarly, a spiritually sedentary life-style can have serious consequences. For example, a person may have some share in the Christian ministry but may limit this to what might be called the comfort zone, putting forth little or no effort to become "a workman with nothing to be ashamed

"ANXIETIES OF LIFE" CAN EASILY PROVE FATAL TO THE FIGURATIVE HEART

of, handling the word of the truth aright." (2 Timothy 2:15) Or one may attend some Christian meetings but may do little to prepare for and participate in them. There may be no spiritual goals or no appetite or enthusiasm for spiritual things. The lack of spiritual exercise eventually weakens, even deadens, what faith he might once have had. (James 2:26) The apostle Paul noted this danger when writing to Hebrew Christians, some of whom apparently had fallen into such a sedentary spiritual life-style. Notice how he warned of the possible hardening effect this could have on their spirituality. "Beware, brothers, for fear there should ever develop in any one of you a wicked heart lacking faith by drawing away from the living God; but keep on exhorting one another each day, as long as it may be called 'Today,' for fear any one of you should become hardened by the deceptive power of sin."—Hebrews 3:12, 13.

Stress. Yet another major cause of physical heart attacks is excessive stress. Similarly, stress, or "anxieties of life," can easily prove

fatal to the figurative heart, even causing the victim to cease serving God entirely. Timely is Jesus' warning in this regard: "Pay attention to yourselves that your hearts never become weighed down with overeating and heavy drinking and anxieties of life, and suddenly that day be instantly upon you as a snare." (Luke 21:34, 35) Stress can also be brought to bear on our figurative heart if we agonize over a secret sin for a prolonged period of time. King David learned from experience the pain associated with such harmful stress when he said: "There is no peace in my bones on account of my sin. For my own errors have passed over my head; like a heavy load they are too heavy for me."—Psalm 38: 3, 4.

Overconfidence. Many victims of a heart attack were very confident about their state of

Neglecting our spiritual health may lead to great pains



health just prior to their heart attack. Often, checkups or medical examinations were brushed off or even laughed off as completely unnecessary. Similarly, some may feel that since they have been Christians for a while, nothing could possibly happen to them. They may neglect submitting themselves to spiritual checkups or self-examination until disaster strikes. It is vital to keep in mind the good counsel against overconfidence as given by the apostle Paul: "Let him that thinks he is standing beware that he does not fall." The course of wisdom is to acknowledge our imperfect nature and to examine ourselves spiritually from time to time.—1 Corinthians 10:12; Proverbs 28:14.

Do Not Ignore Warning Signs

It is with good reason that the Scriptures give high priority to the condition of the figurative heart. At Jeremiah 17:9, 10, we read: "The heart is more treacherous than anything else and is desperate. Who can know it? I, Jehovah, am searching the heart, examining the kidneys, even to give to each one according to his ways, according to the fruitage of his dealings." But besides examining our heart, Jehovah also makes loving provision to help us in making the needed self-examination.

Through "the faithful and discreet slave," we are given timely reminders. (Matthew 24:45) For example, one of the chief ways in which our figurative heart could deceive us is by causing us to indulge in worldly fantasies. These are unrealistic imaginations, day-dreams, idle mind wanderings. Such can become very harmful, especially if they arouse unclean thoughts. Hence, we must reject them completely. If we hate lawlessness as Jesus did, we will guard our heart against indulging in worldly fantasies.—Hebrews 1:8, 9.

Additionally, we have the help of loving elders in the Christian congregation. While the concern of others is certainly appreciated, the responsibility to take care of our figurative heart finally rests with each one of us personally. It is up to us individually to "make sure of all things" and to 'keep testing whether we are in the faith.'—1 Thessalonians 5:21; 2 Corinthians 13:5.

Safeguard the Heart

The Bible principle that "whatever a man is sowing, this he will also reap" applies to the health of our figurative heart as well. (Galatians 6:7) Often, what appears to be a sudden spiritual disaster turns out to have been the result of a long, secret history of indulgence in such spiritually damaging pursuits as viewing pornography, being excessively concerned with material things, or striving for prominence or power.

To protect the heart, therefore, it is essential to watch one's spiritual diet. Nourish the mind and heart by feeding on the Word of God. Shun the mental junk food that is so readily available and so appealing to the flesh but that only results in making the figurative heart insensitive. The psalmist cautions with a fitting—and medically sound—analogy: "Their heart has become unfeeling just like fat."—Psalm 119:70.

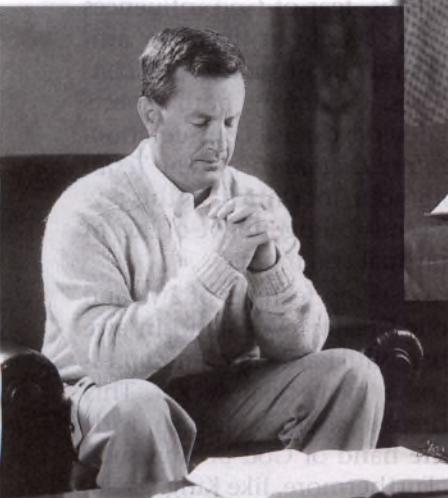
If there are long-standing secret faults, try hard to eradicate them lest they clog up your figurative arteries. If the world begins to look attractive and seems to be offering much in the way of pleasure and enjoyment, meditate on the wise counsel offered by the apostle

Paul. He wrote: "This I say, brothers, the time left is reduced. Henceforth let those . . . making use of the world [be] as those not using it to the full; for the scene of this world is changing." (1 Corinthians 7:29-31) And, if material riches should start to beckon, take to heart Job's words: "If I have put gold as my confidence, or to gold I have said, 'You are my trust!' that too would be an error for attention by the justices, for I should have denied the true God above."—Job 31:24, 28; Psalm 62:10; 1 Timothy 6:9, 10.

Pointing to the seriousness of habitually ignoring Bible-based counsel, the Bible warns: "A man repeatedly reproved but making his neck hard will suddenly be broken, and that without healing." (Proverbs 29:1) On the contrary, by taking good care of our figurative heart, we can experience the pleasure and the peace of mind that come from living a

simple, uncluttered life. This has always been the recommended way of true Christianity. The apostle Paul was inspired to write: "To be sure, it is a means of great gain, this godly devotion along with self-sufficiency. For we have brought nothing into the world, and neither can we carry anything out. So, having sustenance and covering, we shall be content with these things."—1 Timothy 6:6-8.

Yes, training and exercising ourselves in the way of godly devotion will ensure that we have a healthy and strong figurative heart. By keeping a close watch on our spiritual diet, we will allow no room for this world's destructive ways and thinking to cause any harm or damage to our spirituality. Above all, by accepting Jehovah's provisions through his organization, may we regularly submit ourselves to checkups of our figurative heart. Diligently doing so will go a long way toward avoiding the sad consequences of a spiritual heart attack.



Cultivating good spiritual habits safeguards the figurative heart



DEVELOP YOUR HEART TO FEAR JEHOVAH

"If only they would develop this heart of theirs to fear me and to keep all my commandments always."—DEUTERONOMY 5:29.

FEAR has haunted mankind for centuries. Fear of hunger, disease, crime, or war keeps millions of people in constant anxiety. For this reason the preamble of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights expresses the desire to bring about a world where all humans will enjoy freedom from fear.* Happily, God himself assures us that such a world will come—although not by human efforts. Through his prophet Micah, Jehovah promises us that in his new world of righteousness, ‘no one will make his people tremble.’—Micah 4:4.

On the other hand, fear can also be a positive force. In the Scriptures, God’s servants are repeatedly urged to fear Jehovah. Moses told the Israelites: “Jehovah your God you should fear, and him you should serve.” (Deuteronomy 6:13) Centuries later Solomon wrote: “Fear the true God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole obligation of man.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13) Through our witnessing work, carried out under angelic supervision, we likewise urge all people to “fear God and give him glory.” (Revelation 14:6, 7) In addition to fearing Jehovah, Christians must love him with their whole heart. (Mat-

* The General Assembly of the United Nations adopted the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on December 10, 1948.

1. How can we be sure that one day people will enjoy freedom from fear?
2. (a) How do the Scriptures urge us to fear God?
(b) What questions may arise when we consider our obligation to fear God?

thew 22:37, 38) How can we love God and at the same time fear him? Why is it necessary to fear a loving God? What benefits do we derive from cultivating godly fear? To answer these questions, we must first understand what the fear of God means and how this type of fear forms a fundamental part of our relationship with Jehovah.

Awe, Reverence, and Fear

³ Fear of God is a feeling Christians should have toward their Maker. One definition of this fear is “an awe and a profound reverence for the Creator and a wholesome dread of displeasing him.” Thus, fear of God influences two important aspects of our lives: our attitude toward God and our attitude toward conduct that he hates. Obviously, both aspects are crucial and deserve careful consideration. As Vine’s *Expository Dictionary of New Testament Words* points out, for Christians this reverential fear is ‘a controlling motive of life, in matters both spiritual and moral.’

⁴ How can we develop feelings of awe and reverence for our Creator? We stand in awe when we see a beautiful landscape, an impressive waterfall, or a spectacular sunset. This feeling is heightened when we discern, with eyes of faith, the hand of God behind such creative works. Furthermore, like King David, we perceive our own insignificance in comparison with Jehovah’s awesome creation.

3. What does the fear of God mean?
4. How can we develop feelings of awe and reverence for our Creator?

"When I see your heavens, the works of your fingers, the moon and the stars that you have prepared, what is mortal man that you keep him in mind?" (Psalm 8: 3, 4) This profound awe leads to reverence, which moves us to thank and praise Jehovah for all that he does for us. David also wrote: "I shall laud you because in a fear-inspiring way I am wonderfully made. Your works are wonderful, as my soul is very well aware."—Psalm 139:14.

⁵ Feelings of awe and reverence engender a wholesome and respectful fear of God's power as Creator and of his authority as the rightful Ruler of the universe. In a vision that the apostle John saw, "those who come off victorious from the wild beast and from its image"—the anointed followers of Christ in their heavenly position—proclaim: "Great and wonderful are your works, Jehovah God, the Almighty. Righteous and true are your ways, King of eternity. Who will not really fear you,

5. Why should we fear Jehovah, and what fine example do we have in this regard?



Jehovah, and glorify your name?" (Revelation 15:2-4) Fear of God, derived from a profound reverence for his majesty, leads these co-rulers with Christ in the heavenly Kingdom to honor God as the ultimate authority. When we consider all that Jehovah has accomplished and the righteous way in which he governs the universe, do we not have ample reason to fear him? —Psalm 2:11; Jeremiah 10:7.

⁶ In addition to awe and reverence, however, fear of God must include a wholesome dread of displeasing him or being disobedient to him. Why? Because while Jehovah is "slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness," we must remember that "by no means will he give exemption from punishment." (Exodus 34:6, 7) Though loving and merciful, Jehovah does not tolerate unrighteousness and willful wrongdoing. (Psalm 5: 4, 5; Habakkuk 1:13) Those who deliberately and unrepentantly practice what is wicked in

6. Why should we have a wholesome dread of displeasing Jehovah?

Jehovah's eyes and who set themselves in opposition to him cannot do so with impunity. As the apostle Paul said, "it is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God." Having a wholesome dread of falling into such a situation is ultimately a protection for us.—Hebrews 10:31.

"To Him You Should Cling"

⁷ Reverential fear of God and acute awareness of his awesome power are precursors of trust and confidence in Jehovah. Just as a young child feels protected when his father is near, so we feel secure and confident under Jehovah's guiding hand. Note how the Israelites reacted after Jehovah led them out of Egypt: "Israel also got to see the great hand that Jehovah put in action against the Egyptians; and the people began to fear Jehovah and to put faith in Jehovah." (Exodus 14:31) Elisha's experience also testifies to the fact that "the angel of Jehovah is camping all around those fearing him, and he rescues them." (Psalm 34:7; 2 Kings 6:15-17) The modern-day history of Jehovah's people and likely our own personal experience confirm that God does exercise his power in behalf of those who serve him. (2 Chronicles 16:9) Thus we come to appreciate that "in the fear of Jehovah there is strong confidence."—Proverbs 14:26.

⁸ Wholesome fear of God not only fosters trust and confidence in him but also motivates us to walk in his ways. When Solomon inaugurated the temple, he prayed to Jehovah: "May [Israel] fear you by walking in your ways all the days that they are alive upon the surface of the ground that you gave to our forefathers." (2 Chronicles 6:31) Earlier, Moses urged the Israelites: "After Jehovah your God you should walk, and him you should

7. What reasons do we have for trusting in Jehovah's saving power?
8. (a) Why does fear of God move us to walk in his ways? (b) Explain how we should "cling" to Jehovah.

fear, and his commandments you should keep, and to his voice you should listen, and him you should serve, and to him you should cling." (Deuteronomy 13:4) As these verses clearly show, the desire to walk in Jehovah's ways and to "cling" to him comes from trust and confidence in God. Yes, godly fear leads us to obey Jehovah, to serve him, and to cling to him, just as a young child may literally cling to his father in whom he has implicit trust and confidence.—Psalm 63:8; Isaiah 41:13.

To Love God Is to Fear Him

⁹ From a Scriptural standpoint, fearing God does not in any way rule out loving him. On the contrary, the Israelites were instructed to "fear Jehovah . . . so as to walk in all his ways and to love him." (Deuteronomy 10:12) Thus, fear of God and love of God are closely connected. Fear of God moves us to walk in his ways, and this in turn gives proof of our love for him. (1 John 5:3) This is logical because when we love someone, we rightly fear to hurt him. The Israelites hurt Jehovah by their rebellious course in the wilderness. Surely we would not want to do anything to bring such sorrow to our heavenly Father. (Psalm 78:40, 41) On the other hand, since "Jehovah is finding pleasure in those fearing him," our obedience and faithfulness make his heart rejoice. (Psalm 147:11; Proverbs 27:11) Love of God moves us to please him, and fear of God holds us back from hurting him. They are complementary, not contradictory, qualities.

¹⁰ The life course of Jesus Christ clearly illustrates how we can love and fear God at the same time. Of Jesus the prophet Isaiah wrote: "Upon him the spirit of Jehovah must settle down, the spirit of wisdom and of understanding, the spirit of counsel and of mighti-

9. What is the connection between love of God and fear of God?
10. How did Jesus show that he took delight in fearing Jehovah?



Israelite kings were commanded to make a personal copy of the Law and read it daily

hovah is what I shall teach you.” (Psalm 34:11) How can we learn from Jesus to fear Jehovah?

¹² Jesus teaches us to fear Jehovah by helping us to understand the wonderful personality of our heavenly Father. (John 1:18) Jesus’ own example reveals how God thinks and how he deals with others, for Jesus reflects his Father’s personality perfectly. (John 14:9, 10) Furthermore, through Jesus’ sacrifice, we gain access to Jehovah when we pray for forgiveness of our sins. This outstanding expression of God’s mercy is in itself a powerful reason to fear him. The psalmist wrote: “There is the true forgiveness with you, in order that you may be feared.”—Psalm 130:4.

ness, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of Jehovah; and there will be enjoyment by him in the fear of Jehovah.” (Isaiah 11:2, 3) According to this prophecy, God’s spirit moved Jesus to fear his heavenly Father. Furthermore, we note that this fear, far from being restrictive, was a source of satisfaction. Jesus found delight in doing God’s will and in pleasing him, even in the most difficult circumstances. When faced with impending execution on the torture stake, he told Jehovah: “Not as I will, but as you will.” (Matthew 26:39) Because of this godly fear, Jehovah listened favorably to his Son’s supplications, strengthened him, and saved him out of death.—Hebrews 5:7.

Learning to Fear Jehovah

¹¹ Unlike the instinctive awe we feel when confronted by the power and majesty of nature, fear of God does not come automatically. That is why the Greater David, Jesus Christ, prophetically extends to us the invitation: “Come, you sons, listen to me; the fear of Je-

11, 12. (a) Why must we learn to fear God? (b) How does Jesus teach us to fear Jehovah?

¹³ The book of Proverbs outlines a series of steps that enable us to develop godly fear. “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, . . . in that case you will understand the fear of Jehovah, and you will find the very knowledge of God.” (Proverbs 2:1-5) To fear God, therefore, we must study his Word, earnestly endeavor to understand its instruction, and then pay careful attention to its counsel.

¹⁴ Every king of ancient Israel was instructed to make a copy of the Law and ‘read in it all the days of his life, in order that he might learn to fear Jehovah his God so as to keep all the words of the law.’ (Deuteronomy 17:18, 19) Bible reading and study are just as vital for us if we would learn to fear Jehovah. As we

13. What steps outlined in the book of Proverbs help us to fear Jehovah?

14. How can we follow the counsel given to the kings of Israel?

apply Bible principles in our life, we gradually acquire divine wisdom and knowledge. We come to "understand the fear of Jehovah" because we see the good results it produces in our life, and we treasure our relationship with God. Furthermore, by congregating regularly with fellow believers, both young and old can listen to divine teaching, learn to fear God, and walk in his ways.—Deuteronomy 31:12.

Happy Is Everyone Fearing Jehovah

¹⁵ From the foregoing, we can see that fear of God is a wholesome attitude that all of us should cultivate, since it is a fundamental part of our worship of Jehovah. It leads us to trust in him implicitly, to walk in his ways, and to cling to him. As was true of Jesus Christ, fear of God can also move us to fulfill our dedication vow now and for all eternity.

¹⁶ Godly fear is never morbid or unduly restrictive. "Happy is everyone fearing Jehovah, who is walking in his ways," the Bible assures us. (Psalm 128:1) Jehovah encourages us to fear him because he knows that this quality will protect us. We note his loving concern in

15. In what ways is fear of God related to our worship of him?

16. Why does Jehovah encourage us to fear him?

Can You Answer the Following?

- What does fear of God mean, and how does it affect us?
- What is the connection between fearing God and walking with God?
- How does the example of Jesus show that fear of God is related to love of God?
- In what ways can we develop our heart to fear Jehovah?



his words to Moses: "If only they [the Israelites] would develop this heart of theirs to fear me and to keep all my commandments always, in order that it might go well with them and their sons to time indefinite!"—Deuteronomy 5:29.

¹⁷ Similarly, if we develop our heart to fear God, it will go well with us. In what ways? First of all, such an attitude will please God and will draw us close to him. David knew from personal experience that "the desire of those fearing him he will perform, and their cry for help he will hear, and he will save them." (Psalm 145:19) Second, godly fear will benefit us because it will affect our attitude toward what is bad. (Proverbs 3:7) The following article will examine how this fear safeguards us from spiritual danger, and it will review some Scriptural examples of men who feared God and turned aside from bad.

17. (a) What benefits do we derive from fearing God? (b) What aspects of godly fear will be considered in the following article?

FEAR JEHOVAH AND KEEP HIS COMMANDMENTS

"Fear the true God and keep his commandments. For this is the whole obligation of man."—ECCLESIASTES 12:13.

JUST as courage imperils life, fear protects it," observed Leonardo da Vinci. Bravado, or foolhardy courage, blinds a man to danger, whereas fear reminds him to be careful. For example, if we get near the edge of a cliff and see how far down we could fall, most of us instinctively move back. Similarly, a wholesome fear not only promotes a good relationship with God, as we learned in the preceding article, but also helps safeguard us from injury.

² Fear of many modern-day hazards, however, has to be learned. Since young children are unaware of the dangers of electricity or city traffic, they can easily have a serious accident.* Wise parents try to instill a wholesome

* Some adults lose their fear of danger when their work brings them into regular contact with hazardous situations. When asked why so many carpenters have a finger missing, an experienced craftsman simply replied: "They lose their fear of those high-speed electric saws."

- 1, 2. (a) How can fear protect us physically? (b) Why do wise parents endeavor to instill a wholesome fear in their children?



Wise parents instill a wholesome fear in their offspring

fear in their offspring, warning them again and again of surrounding dangers. Parents know that this fear may well save their children's life.

³ Jehovah has a similar concern for our well-being. As a loving Father, he teaches us through his Word and his organization to benefit ourselves. (Isaiah 48:17) Part of this divine teaching program involves warning us "again and again" about spiritual pitfalls so that we can develop a healthy fear of such danger. (2 Chronicles 36:15; 2 Peter 3:1) Throughout history many spiritual disasters could have been avoided and much suffering averted 'if only people had developed this heart of theirs to fear God and keep his commandments.' (Deuteronomy 5:29) In these "critical times hard to deal with," how can we develop our heart to fear God and keep out of spiritual danger?—2 Timothy 3:1.

Turn Away From Bad

⁴ The Bible explains that "the fear of Jehovah means the hating of bad." (Proverbs 8:13) A Bible lexicon describes this hatred as "an emotional attitude toward persons and things which are opposed, detested, despised and with which one wishes to have no contact or relationship." So godly fear includes an inner aversion or disgust toward all that is

3. Why and how does Jehovah warn us about spiritual dangers?
4. (a) What hatred should Christians cultivate? (b) How does Jehovah feel about sinful conduct? (See footnote.)

bad in Jehovah's eyes.* (Psalm 97:10) It impels us to turn aside from bad, just as we would back away from the edge of a cliff when our instinctive fear sounds the alarm. "In the fear of Jehovah one turns away from bad," says the Bible.—Proverbs 16:6.

⁵ We can reinforce this wholesome fear and hatred for what is bad by considering the harmful consequences that sin inevitably brings. The Bible assures us that we will reap what we sow—whether we sow according to the flesh or according to the spirit. (Galatians 6:7, 8) For this reason Jehovah graphically described the inevitable results of disregarding his commandments and abandoning true worship. Without divine protection, the small, vulnerable nation of Israel would be at the mercy of cruel and powerful neighbors. (Deuteronomy 28:15, 45-48) The tragic outcome of Israel's disobedience was recorded in detail in the Bible "for a warning" so that we can learn the lesson and cultivate godly fear.

—1 Corinthians 10:11.

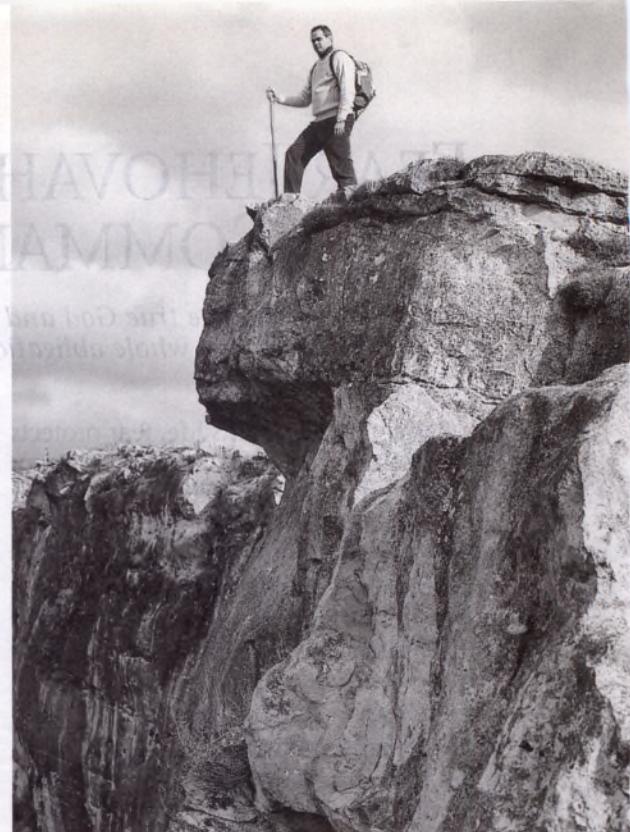
⁶ Apart from what happened to the nation of Israel as a whole, the Bible contains real-life experiences of individuals who were overtaken by jealousy, immorality, greed, or pride.[#] Some of these men had served Jehovah for many years, but at one crucial mo-

* Jehovah himself feels this disgust. For example, Ephesians 4:29 describes bad language as "rotten saying." The Greek word used for "rotten" literally refers to putrefying fruit, fish, or meat. Such a term vividly portrays the repulsion that we should feel toward abusive or obscene speech. Likewise, idols are often described in the Scriptures as "dungy." (Deuteronomy 29:17; Ezekiel 6:9) Our natural aversion to dung, or excrement, helps us to understand God's feeling of disgust for any form of idolatry.

[#] By way of example, consider the Scriptural accounts of Cain (Genesis 4:3-12); David (2 Samuel 11:2-12:14); Gehazi (2 Kings 5:20-27); and Uzziah (2 Chronicles 26:16-21).

5. (a) How can we strengthen our godly fear and our hatred for what is bad? (b) What does the history of the nation of Israel teach us in this regard?

6. What are some Scriptural examples that we can consider in learning godly fear? (See footnote.)



Just as fear turns us away from danger, godly fear turns us away from what is bad

ment in their life, their fear of God was not sufficiently strong, and they reaped a bitter harvest. Meditating on such Scriptural examples can strengthen our resolve not to make similar mistakes. How sad it would be if we waited until we had a personal tragedy before taking God's advice to heart! Contrary to what is commonly believed, experience—especially from self-indulgence—is not the best teacher.—Psalm 19:7.

⁷ Another powerful reason for cultivating godly fear is our desire to safeguard our relationship with God. We fear to displease Jehovah because we treasure his friendship. Whom does God consider to be a friend, someone he would invite into his figurative tent? Only the one "who is walking faultless-

7. Who does Jehovah invite into his figurative tent?

ly and practicing righteousness." (Psalm 15:1, 2) If we value this privileged relationship with our Creator, we will take care to walk faultlessly in his eyes.

⁸ Sadly, some Israelites in Malachi's day took friendship with God for granted. Instead of fearing and honoring Jehovah, they offered sick and lame animals on his altar. Their lack of godly fear was also reflected in their attitude toward marriage. In order to marry younger women, they divorced the wives of their youth for trivial reasons. Malachi told them that Jehovah hated "a divorcing" and that their treacherous spirit had alienated them from their God. How could God look with favor on their sacrifices when the altar was figuratively covered with tears—the bitter tears shed by their abandoned wives? Such flagrant disrespect for his standards moved Jehovah to ask: "Where is the fear of me?"—Malachi 1:6-8; 2:13-16.

⁹ Today, Jehovah likewise sees the heartbreak of many innocent mates and children who have been devastated by selfish and immoral husbands and fathers or even wives and mothers. Surely it grieves him. A friend of God will see matters the way God sees them and will work hard to strengthen his marriage, reject worldly thinking that belittles the importance of the marriage bond, and "flee from fornication."—1 Corinthians 6:18.

¹⁰ In marriage as well as in other areas of our life, hatred for all that is bad in Jehovah's eyes, along with a deep appreciation for his friendship, will bring Jehovah's favor and approval. The apostle Peter firmly stated: "For a certainty I perceive that God is not partial, but in every nation the man that fears him and works righteousness is acceptable to

8. How did some Israelites in Malachi's day take friendship with God for granted?

9, 10. How can we show that we value Jehovah's friendship?

him." (Acts 10:34, 35) We have many Scriptural examples that show how godly fear moved individuals to do what was right in various trying circumstances.

Three Who Feared God

¹¹ There is one man in the Bible whom Jehovah personally described as his friend—the patriarch Abraham. (Isaiah 41:8) Abraham's godly fear was put to the test when God asked him to offer as a sacrifice his only son, Isaac, through whom God would fulfill his promise that Abraham's offspring would become a great nation. (Genesis 12:2, 3; 17:19) Would "Jehovah's friend" pass this painful test? (James 2:23) At the very moment when Abraham raised his knife to kill Isaac, Jehovah's angel said: "Do not put out your hand against the boy and do not do anything at all to him, for now I do know that you are God-fearing in that you have not withheld your son, your only one, from me."—Genesis 22:10-12.

¹² Although Abraham had previously proved himself to be one who feared Jehovah, on that occasion he manifested his godly fear in an outstanding way. His willingness to sacrifice Isaac was far more than a show of respectful obedience. Abraham was motivated by an absolute trust that his heavenly Father would fulfill His promise by resurrecting Isaac if necessary. As Paul wrote, Abraham was "fully convinced that what [God] had promised he was also able to do." (Romans 4:16-21) Are we prepared to do God's will even when it requires major sacrifices? Do we have total confidence that such obedience will bring long-term benefits, knowing that Jehovah is "the rewarder of those earnestly seeking him"? (Hebrews 11:6) That is true fear of God.—Psalm 115:11.

11. Under what circumstances was Abraham declared to be "God-fearing"?

12. What motivated Abraham's godly fear, and how can we show a similar spirit?

¹³ Let us examine another example of godly fear in action—that of Joseph. As a slave in Potiphar's household, Joseph daily found himself faced with pressure to commit adultery. There apparently was no way he could avoid contact with his master's wife, who persistently made immoral advances toward him. Finally, when she "grabbed hold of him," he "took to flight and went on outside." What impelled him to turn aside from bad immediately? Undoubtedly, the principal factor was fear of God, the desire to avoid committing "this great badness and actually sin against God." (Genesis 39:7-12) Joseph could rightly describe himself as a man who 'feared the true God.'—Genesis 42:18.

¹⁴ Years later Joseph came face-to-face with his brothers, who had heartlessly sold him into slavery. He could easily have used their desperate need for food as an opportunity to avenge the wrong they had done to him. But treating people tyrannically does not reflect the fear of God. (Leviticus 25:43) Thus, when Joseph saw ample proof of his brothers' change of heart, he mercifully forgave them. Like Joseph, our godly fear will move

13. Why could Joseph rightly describe himself as a man who 'feared the true God'?
14. How did Joseph's mercy reflect true fear of God?

Do You Remember?

- How do we learn to hate what is bad?
- How did some Israelites in Malachi's day take Jehovah's friendship for granted?
- What can we learn from Abraham, Joseph, and Job about the fear of God?
- Which fear will never be done away with, and why?

us to conquer evil with good, as well as hold us back from falling into temptation.—Genesis 45:1-11; Psalm 130:3, 4; Romans 12:17-21.

¹⁵ Job was another outstanding example of one who feared God. Jehovah said to the Devil: "Have you set your heart upon my servant Job, that there is no one like him in the earth, a man blameless and upright, fearing God and turning aside from bad?" (Job 1:8) For many years, Job's blameless conduct had gladdened the heart of his heavenly Father. Job feared God because he knew that it was the right thing to do and the best way to live. "Look! The fear of Jehovah—that is wisdom," Job exclaimed, "and to turn away from bad is understanding." (Job 28:28) As a married man, Job was not improperly attentive to young women, nor did he harbor adulterous schemes in his heart. Although a rich man, he refused to put his trust in riches, and he shunned every form of idolatry.—Job 31:1, 9-11, 24-28.

¹⁶ Fear of God, however, means doing what is good as well as turning aside from what is bad. Thus, Job took a kindly interest in the blind, the lame, and the poor. (Leviticus 19:14; Job 29:15, 16) Job understood that "anyone who withholds loving-kindness from his own fellow, he will also leave off even the fear of the Almighty." (Job 6:14) Withholding loving-kindness could include withholding forgiveness or harboring a grudge. At God's direction, Job prayed in behalf of his three companions, who had caused him so much grief. (Job 42:7-10) Could we show a similar forgiving spirit toward a fellow believer who may have hurt us in some way? A sincere prayer in behalf of the one who has offended us can do much to help us overcome

15. Why had Job's conduct gladdened Jehovah's heart?
16. (a) In what ways did Job exercise loving-kindness? (b) How did Job show that he did not withhold forgiveness?



From the Bible translation Vulgata Latina, 1795

Job maintained his fear of God even when confronted with three false friends

resentment. The blessings Job enjoyed for his godly fear give us a foregleam of ‘the abundant goodness Jehovah has treasured up for those fearing him.’—Psalm 31:19; James 5:11.

Fear of God Versus Fear of Man

¹⁷ While fear of God can impel us to do what is right, fear of man can undermine our faith. For this reason, when encouraging the apostles to be zealous preachers of the good news, Jesus told them: “Do not become fearful of those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul; but rather be in fear of him that

17. What can fear of men do to us, but why is such fear shortsighted?

can destroy both soul and body in Gehenna.” (Matthew 10:28) Fear of men is shortsighted, Jesus explained, for men cannot destroy our future life prospects. Furthermore, we fear God because we recognize his awesome power, in comparison with which the might of all the nations is insignificant. (Isaiah 40:15) Like Abraham we have absolute confidence in Jehovah’s power to resurrect His faithful servants. (Revelation 2:10) Thus, we say with confidence: “If God is for us, who will be against us?”—Romans 8:31.

¹⁸ Whether our opposer is a family member or a school-yard bully, we will find that “in the fear of Jehovah there is strong confidence.” (Proverbs 14:26) We can pray to God for strength, knowing that he will hear us. (Psalm 145:19) Jehovah never forgets those who fear him. Through his prophet Malachi, he reassures us: “At that time those in fear of Jehovah spoke with one another, each one with his companion, and Jehovah kept paying attention and listening. And a book of remembrance began to be written up before him for those in fear of Jehovah and for those thinking upon his name.”—Malachi 3:16.

¹⁹ The time is near when everyone on earth will worship Jehovah and fear of man will disappear. (Isaiah 11:9) Fear of hunger, disease, crime, and war will also be gone. But the fear of God will remain throughout eternity as his faithful servants in heaven and on earth continue to show him due respect, obedience, and honor. (Revelation 15:4) Meanwhile, may all of us take to heart the inspired counsel of Solomon: “Let your heart not be envious of sinners, but be in the fear of Jehovah all day long. For in that case there will exist a future, and your own hope will not be cut off.”—Proverbs 23:17, 18.

18. In what way does Jehovah reward those who fear him?

19. What kinds of fear will come to an end, but which sort will remain forever?



ACCEPTING JEHOVAH'S INVITATIONS BRINGS REWARDS

AS TOLD BY
MARIA DO CÉU ZANARDI

"Jehovah knows what he is doing. If he has sent you the invitation, you should humbly accept it." These words of my father, spoken some 45 years ago, helped me to accept the first invitation I received from Jehovah's organization, to serve as a full-time minister. Today, I am still grateful for my father's advice because accepting such invitations has brought me rich rewards.

IN 1928, Father subscribed to the *Watchtower* magazine and became interested in the Bible. Since he lived in central Portugal, his only contact with God's congregation was the publications he received by mail and a Bible that had belonged to my grandparents. In 1949, when I was 13 years old, our family immigrated to Brazil, Mother's home country, and settled in the outskirts of Rio de Janeiro.

Our new neighbors invited us to visit their church, and we went a few times. Father liked

to quiz them about hellfire, the soul, and the future of the earth—but they had no answers. "We will just have to wait for the true Bible students," Father used to say.

One day, a blind man called at our home offering *The Watchtower* and *Awake!* Father asked him about the same things, and he gave sound Bible-based answers. The following week, another one of Jehovah's Witnesses visited us. After answering more questions, she excused herself and said that she had to go to the "field." When Father expressed sur-

prise that the Witnesses engaged in sports, she read Matthew 13:38 to him: "The field is the world." Father asked: "May I go too?" "Of course," came the reply. We were overjoyed to have found Bible truth again! Father was baptized at the next convention, and I was baptized soon thereafter, in November 1955.

Accepting My First Invitation

A year and a half later, I received from the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rio de Janeiro a large brown envelope with an invitation for me to enter the full-time preaching work. Mother's health was very poor at the time, so I asked my father for his advice. "Jehovah knows what he is doing," was his firm reply. "If he has sent you the invitation, you should humbly accept it." Spurred on by these words, I filled out the application form and entered the full-time service on July 1,

1957. My first assignment was Três Rios, a town in Rio de Janeiro State.

At first, the inhabitants of Três Rios were reluctant to listen to our message because we did not use a Catholic version of the Bible. Help came when we started a Bible study with Geraldo Ramalho, a practicing Catholic. With his help I was able to obtain a Bible with the local priest's signature. From then on, whenever anyone raised an objection, I showed them the priest's signature, and no more questions were asked. Geraldo was later baptized.

I was overjoyed when a circuit assembly was held right in the center of Três Rios in 1959. The police chief, who was studying the Bible at the time, even arranged to put up banners advertising the program throughout town. After working for three years in Três Rios, I was invited to a new assignment in Itu, about 70 miles west of São Paulo.

Red, Blue, and Yellow Books

After some searching, my pioneer partner and I found comfortable lodgings in the center of town with Maria, a kindhearted widow. Maria treated us as her own daughters. Before long, though, the Roman Catholic bishop of Itu visited her and told her to send us away, but she stood her ground: "When my husband died, you did nothing to console me. These Jehovah's Witnesses have helped me even though I am not a member of their religion."

About that time, a woman informed us that the Catholic priests of Itu had forbidden their parishioners to accept copies of "the red book about the Devil." They were referring to *"Let God Be True,"* the Biblical publication we had been offering people during the week. Since the red book had been "banned" by the priests, we prepared a presentation for the blue book (*"New Heavens and a New Earth"*). Later, when the clergy got wind of



this change, we moved on to the yellow book (*What Has Religion Done for Mankind?*), and so on. It was a good thing that we had a variety of books with covers of different colors!

After about a year in Itu, I received a telegram inviting me to work temporarily at Bethel, the branch home of Jehovah's Witnesses in Rio de Janeiro, in preparation for the national assembly. I gladly accepted.

Further Privileges and Challenges

At Bethel, there was no shortage of work, and I was happy to help in any way possible. How enriching it was to attend the discussion of the daily text each morning and the family *Watchtower* Study on Monday evenings! The heartfelt prayers of Otto Estelmann and other experienced members of the Bethel family affected me deeply.

After the national assembly, I packed my bags to return to Itu, but to my surprise, the branch servant, Grant Miller, handed me a letter inviting me to become a permanent member of the Bethel family. My roommate

was Sister Hosa Yazedjian, who still serves in Brazil Bethel. In those days the Bethel family was small—only 28 of us—and we were all close friends.

In 1964, João Zanardi, a young full-time minister, came to Bethel to receive training. He was then assigned as a circuit servant, or traveling overseer, nearby. We sometimes met when he came to Bethel to hand in his reports. The branch servant gave João permission to attend the family study on Monday evenings, so we were able to spend more time together. João and I were married in August 1965. I happily accepted the invitation to join my husband in the circuit work.

In those days the traveling work in the interior of Brazil was something of an adventure. I will never forget our visits to the group of publishers in Aranha, Minas Gerais State. We had to take a train and then walk the rest of the way—loaded down with suitcases, typewriter, slide projector, service bags, and literature. How happy we were to find Lourival Chantal, an elderly brother, always waiting at the station to help us with our bags.

The meetings in Aranha were held in a rented house. We slept in a small room in the back. On one side, there was a log fire that we used for cooking and for heating water that the brothers brought us in buckets. A hole in the ground in the middle of a nearby bamboo plantation served as a toilet. At night we left a gaslight burning to ward off the barber beetles—insects that can transmit Chagas' disease. In the morning our nostrils were always black with smoke. Quite an interesting experience!

While serving in a circuit in Paraná State, we again received one of those large brown envelopes from the branch office. Yet another invitation from Jehovah's organization—this time to serve in Portugal! The letter advised us to consider the principle of Luke 14:28 and count the cost before ac-



With the Brazil Bethel family in 1963



Our wedding in August 1965

cepting this assignment because our Christian work was under ban there, and the Portuguese government had already arrested many brothers.

Would we go to a land where we would face such persecution? "If our Portuguese brothers can live there and serve Jehovah faithfully, why can't we?" João said. Recalling my father's words of encouragement, I agreed: "If Jehovah has sent us the invitation, we should accept it and trust in him." Soon afterward, we were at Bethel in São Paulo, receiving further instructions and preparing our documents for the journey.

João Maria and Maria João

Our boat, the *Eugenio C.*, set sail from the port of Santos, São Paulo State, on September 6, 1969. After nine days at sea, we arrived in Portugal. At first, we spent several months working with experienced brothers in the narrow streets of Alfama and Mouraria, in the old district of Lisbon. They trained us to

be observant so that we would not be easily caught by the police.

Congregation meetings were held in the homes of Witnesses. When we noticed that the neighbors were becoming suspicious, the meetings were quickly moved to another location so that the house would not be raided or the brothers arrested. Picnics, as we called our assemblies, were held in Monsanto Park, on the outskirts of Lisbon, and at Costa da Caparica, a wooded area on the coast. We dressed casually for the occasion, and a group of vigilant attendants stood guard at strategic points. If anyone suspicious approached, we had time to improvise a game, set up a picnic, or start singing a folk song.

An assembly in Portugal while the work was under ban



To make it harder for the security police to identify us, we avoided using our real names. The brothers knew us as João Maria and Maria João. Our names were not used in any correspondence or records. Instead, we were assigned numbers. I made a conscious decision not to memorize the addresses of the brothers. That way, if I was arrested, it would not be possible for me to betray them.

Despite the restrictions, João and I were determined to take advantage of every opportunity to give a witness, since we knew

that we might lose our freedom at any moment. We learned to rely on our heavenly Father, Jehovah. As our Protector, he used his angels in such a way that we felt we were "seeing the One who is invisible."—Hebrews 11:27.

On one occasion, preaching from house to house in Porto, we met a man who insisted on inviting us in. The sister I was working with accepted without hesitation, and I had no option but to accompany her. To my horror, I noticed that there was a photograph of someone in a military uniform in the hallway. What to do now? Our host had us sit down, and then he asked me: "Would you let your son serve in the army if he was called up?" It was a delicate situation. Calmly, but after praying silently, I replied: "I do not have any children, and I am sure that if I were to ask you such a hypothetical question, you would give me the same answer." He fell silent. So I continued: "Now if you were to ask me what it feels like to lose a brother or a father, that I can answer because both my brother and my father are dead." My eyes filled with tears as I spoke, and I noticed that he was nearly crying as well. He explained that his wife had died recently. He listened intently while I explained the resurrection hope. Then we politely said good-bye and departed safely, leaving the matter in Jehovah's hands.

Despite the ban, sincere people were helped to gain a knowledge of the truth. It was in Porto that my husband started a study with Horácio, a businessman, who made rapid progress. Later his son Emílio, an excellent doctor, also took his stand for Jehovah and was baptized. Truly, nothing can stop Jehovah's holy spirit.

"You Never Know What Jehovah Will Allow"

In 1973, João and I were invited to attend the "Divine Victory" International As-

sembly in Brussels, Belgium. Thousands of Spanish and Belgian brothers were present, as well as delegates from Mozambique, Angola, Cape Verde, Madeira, and the Azores. In his concluding comments, Brother Knorr, from headquarters in New York, exhorted:



Street witnessing in Lisbon during the 1978 "Victorious Faith" International Convention

"Keep on faithfully serving Jehovah. You never know what Jehovah will allow. Who knows, you may be attending your next international convention in Portugal!"

The following year the preaching work received legal recognition in Portugal. And true to Brother Knorr's words, in 1978 we held our first international convention in Lisbon. What a privilege to go on a march through the streets of Lisbon, giving a wit-

ness with placards, magazines, and invitations to the public talk! It was a dream come true.

We had grown to love our Portuguese brothers, many of whom had suffered imprisonment and beatings for maintaining their Christian neutrality. Our desire was to continue serving in Portugal. However, it was not to be. In 1982, João developed a serious heart problem, and the branch office suggested that we return to Brazil.

A Trying Time

The brothers at the Brazil branch office were very supportive and assigned us to serve in the Quiririm Congregation in Taubaté, São Paulo State. João's health deteriorated rapidly, and soon he was housebound. Interested individuals came to our home to study the Bible, and there were meetings for field service every day, as well as the weekly group study. These provisions helped us to maintain our spirituality.

João continued to do what he could in Jehovah's service right up till his death on October 1, 1985. I was sad and somewhat depressed, but I was determined to carry on in my assignment. Another setback came in April 1986 when burglars broke into my home and stole almost everything. For the first time in my life, I felt lonely and afraid. A couple lovingly invited me to stay with them for a while, for which I was most grateful.

The death of João and the burglary also affected my service to Jehovah. I no longer felt confident in the ministry. After writing to the branch office about the difficulty, I received an invitation to spend some time at Bethel to help me regain my emotional balance. How strengthening a time that was!

As soon as I felt a little better, I accepted an assignment to serve in Ipuã, a town

in the state of São Paulo. The preaching work kept me busy, but there were times when I felt discouraged. At such times, I phoned the brothers in Quiririm, and a family came to visit me for a few days. Those visits were truly encouraging! During my first year in Ipuã, 38 different brothers and sisters made the long journey to see me.

In 1992, six years after the death of João, I received another invitation from Jehovah's organization, this time to move to Franca, São Paulo State, where I still serve as a full-time minister. The territory here is very productive. In 1994, I started a Bible study with the mayor. At the time, he was campaigning for a seat in the Brazil congress, but despite his busy schedule, we studied every Monday afternoon. To avoid interruptions he would switch off his phone. How happy it made me to see him gradually withdraw from politics and, with the help of the truth, rebuild his marriage! He and his wife were baptized in 1998.

Looking back, I can say that my life as a full-time minister has been one of immense blessings and privileges. Accepting the invitations that Jehovah has extended to me through his organization has truly brought me rich rewards. And whatever invitations may come in the future, my willingness to accept them is as strong as ever.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

The Real Jesus

Relief From Stress—A Practical Remedy

"I Appeal to Caesar!"



Reproduced from *Illustrierte Prophetie-Bibel/Heilige Schrift des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, nach der deutschen Übersetzung D. Martin Luther's.

Questions From Readers

Does God's direction recorded at Jeremiah 7:16 mean that Christians would not pray about someone who has been expelled from the Christian congregation because he is an unrepentant sinner?

After pronouncing his judgment against unfaithful Judah, Jehovah said to Jeremiah: "As for you, do not pray in behalf of this people, neither raise in their behalf an entreating cry or a prayer nor beseech me, for I shall not be listening to you."—Jeremiah 7:16.

Why did Jehovah forbid Jeremiah to pray for the Israelites? Clearly, it was because of their flagrant transgressions of his Law. Openly and shamelessly, they were "stealing, murdering and committing adultery and swearing falsely and making sacrificial smoke to Baal and walking after other gods." Consequently, Jehovah told the faithless Jews: "I will throw you out from before my face, just as I threw out all your

brothers, the whole offspring of Ephraim." Certainly, it would be out of place for Jeremiah, or anyone else, to pray for Jehovah to reverse His judgment.—Jeremiah 7:9, 15.

In line with this, the apostle John wrote about proper prayer to God. First, he assured Christians: "No matter what it is that we ask according to his will, he hears us." (1 John 5:14) Then, regarding praying in behalf of others, John continued: "If anyone catches sight of his brother sinning a sin that does not incur death, he will ask, and he will give life to him, yes, to those not sinning so as to incur death. There is a sin that does incur death. It is concerning that sin that I do not tell him to make request." (1 John 5:16) Jesus also spoke of sin that "will not be forgiven," that is, sin against the holy spirit.—Matthew 12:31, 32.

Does this mean that all who are expelled from the Christian congregation for sinning

unrepentantly have committed sins that “incur death” and thus should not be prayed about? This would not necessarily be the case because in some instances such transgressions are not sins that incur death. In fact, it is difficult to tell if they are. A typical example is King Manasseh of Judah. He erected altars to false gods, offered up his own sons in sacrifice, practiced spiritism, and put a carved image in Jehovah’s temple. In fact, the Bible says that Manasseh and the people did “what was bad more than the nations whom Jehovah had annihilated from before the sons of Israel.” For all of this, Jehovah punished Manasseh by sending him as captive in fetters to Babylon.—2 Kings 21:1-9; 2 Chronicles 33:1-11.

Were Manasseh’s sins, gross as they were, the kind that incur death? Apparently not, for the account goes on to say about him: “As soon as it caused him distress, he softened the face of Jehovah his God and kept humbling himself greatly because of the God of his forefathers. And he kept praying to Him, so that He let himself be entreated by him and He heard his request for favor and restored him to Jerusalem to his kingship; and Manasseh came to know that Jehovah is the true God.”—2 Chronicles 33:12, 13.

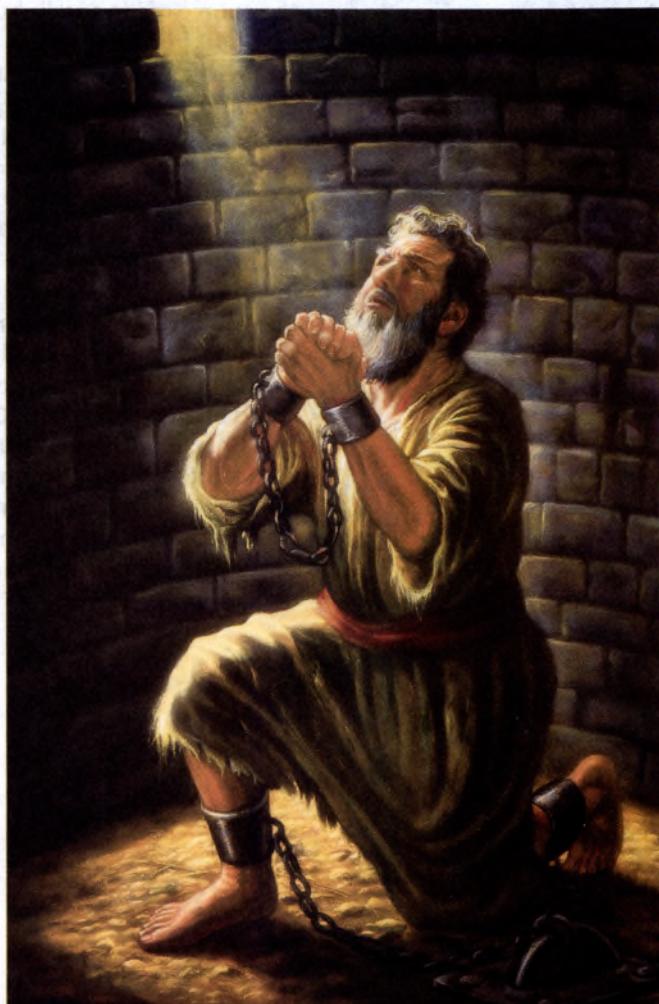
Thus, we should not jump to the conclusion that a person must be guilty of sin that incurs death solely because he is expelled from the congregation. It may take time for the true heart condition of the individual to be revealed. In fact, it is often stated that one of the purposes of disfellowshipping is to cause the sinner to wake up and hopefully to repent and turn around.

Since the person is no longer in the congregation, any change in heart and attitude may be observed first by those close to him, such as a marriage mate or family members. Those

observing such changes may conclude that the transgressor did not commit a sin that incurs death. They may be moved to pray that he may draw strength from God’s inspired Word and that Jehovah will act toward the sinner in harmony with His will.—Psalm 44:21; Ecclesiastes 12:14.

While some may be in a position to observe sufficient evidence to believe that the sinner has repented, this may not be the case with the congregation in general. They would be puzzled, troubled, even stumbled if they were to hear someone praying publicly about the erring one. For this reason, those who feel moved to pray about the sinner should do so only in private, leaving any further development in the matter in the hands of the responsible elders in the congregation.

Manasseh’s gross sins were forgiven when he humbled himself before Jehovah



"By Light From You We Can See Light"

LIIGHT is something we often take for granted until there is a power failure and our neighborhood is plunged into darkness. Happily, our celestial "power station"—the sun—is totally reliable. And thanks to light from the sun, we can see, eat, breathe, and live.

Since light is essential for life, we should not be surprised to read in Genesis that light appeared on the first creative day. "God proceeded to say: 'Let light come to be.' Then there came to be light." (Genesis 1:3) Reverent men like King David have always recognized Jehovah as the source of life and light. "With you is the source of life," David wrote. "By light from you we can see light."—Psalm 36:9.

David's words apply both literally and figuratively. The *Encyclopaedia Britannica* points out: "Light, certainly, is responsible for the sensation of sight." It then adds: "More information reaches the human brain through the eyes than through any other sense organ." Since much of what we learn depends on the gift of sight—which needs light to function properly—light is also used in the Scriptures in a figurative way.

Thus, Jesus told his disciples: "I am the light of the world. He that follows me will by no means walk in darkness, but will possess the light of life." (John 8:12) The figurative light referred to by Jesus was the message of truth he preached, which could illuminate the minds and hearts of his listeners. After years of spiritual darkness, Jesus' disciples could finally understand God's purpose for mankind and the hope of the Kingdom. This was truly "light of life," since that knowledge could lead to eternal life. "This means everlasting life," Jesus said in prayer to his heavenly Father, "their taking in knowledge of you, the only true God, and of the one whom you sent forth, Jesus Christ." (John 17:3) May we never take for granted this spiritual light!