

MARCH 15, 2012

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY EDITION

STUDY ARTICLES

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MARCH 15, 2012

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ENGLISH

THE PURPOSE OF THIS MAGAZINE, *The Watchtower*, is to honor Jehovah God, the Supreme Ruler of the universe. Just as watchtowers in ancient times enabled a person to observe developments from afar, so this magazine shows us the significance of world events in the light of Bible prophecies. It comforts people with the good news that God's Kingdom, which is a real government in heaven, will soon bring an end to all wickedness and transform the earth into a paradise. It promotes faith in Jesus Christ, who died so that we might gain everlasting life and who is now ruling as King of God's Kingdom. This magazine has been published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879 and is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

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COVER: Many young Witnesses in Malawi have shared with schoolmates interesting and useful information from the *Young People Ask* book

MALAWI

POPULATION
13,077,160

PUBLISHERS
79,157



KINGDOM HALL CONSTRUCTION
1,031 since 1998

PURPOSE OF STUDY ARTICLES

STUDY ARTICLES 1, 2 PAGES 10-19

False religious teachings have lulled millions into spiritual drowsiness or sleep. These two articles discuss how to awaken people and why it is urgent that we do so. Also, how can we maintain a sense of urgency, and what does preaching with urgency mean?

STUDY ARTICLE 3 PAGES 20-24

The apostle Peter wrote that anointed Christians have "a living hope." (1 Pet. 1:3) How is that true, and how does it relate to the "other sheep"? (John 10:16) This article will help you to see why you have reason to rejoice over your hope and to look forward to the realization of it.

STUDY ARTICLE 4 PAGES 25-29

Jesus warned: "Remember the wife of Lot." (Luke 17:32) What was the point of Jesus' warning? This article will help us to recognize three areas in which we may need to apply that warning. See if in your life one or more need attention.

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PLEASANTNESS
AT YOUR RIGHT
HAND FOREVER"

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PLEASE TAKE
OUR PICTURE?"



"There Is Pleasantness at Your Right Hand Forever"

AS TOLD BY LOIS DIDUR

How often in your life have you said something like this, 'I wish I had not made the choice I did'? Well, after 50 years in full-time service, I cannot think of anything lastingly unpleasant that has come from being at Jehovah's right hand. Let me tell you why.

I WAS born in 1939 and grew up in rural Saskatchewan, Canada, along with four sisters and a brother. Life on the prairie farm was happy. One day, Jehovah's Witnesses called on my father, and I asked them if God has a name. They showed us the name Jehovah at Psalm 83:18. That made me want to know more about God and his Word.

In those years, farm children went to one-room rural schools up to the eighth grade. They rode horses or walked the many miles to school. The schoolteacher's needs were provided for by families in the district. One year, it was my parents' turn to accommodate the new teacher, John Didur.

Unknown to me, this young man too had a keen interest in God's Word. Once I was praising communism and socialism, which my father then advocated. John quietly replied: "No man

has the right to rule over other men. Only God has that right." That led to many interesting conversations.

Having been born in 1931, John had heard of the hardships of war. When the Korean War erupted in 1950, he questioned various churchmen about their involvement in war. All said that it was acceptable for Christians to take up arms. Later, he asked Jehovah's Witnesses the same question. They directed him to the Scriptural stand toward war that the early Christians

When I married John



took. John was baptized in 1955. The following year, I was too. We both knew that we wanted to serve Jehovah with our life and energy. (Ps. 37: 3, 4) In July 1957, John and I were married.

Many a year on our wedding anniversary, we were at a convention. We were glad to be in the company of thousands of others who respected marriage. Our first international convention was in 1958. Five of us set off for New York City by car from Saskatchewan. For a week, we drove by day, and each night we slept in a tent. Imagine our surprise when a brother we met in Bethlehem, Pennsylvania, invited us to stay at his family home that night! His spontaneous kindness allowed us to arrive in New York City clean and tidy. That huge convention impressed on us the outstanding pleasure of serving Jehovah! As the psalmist wrote, "there is pleasantness at your right hand forever."—Ps. 16:11.

PIONEERING

A year later, in 1959, we were pioneering and living in a small house trailer on top of a prairie hill in Saskatchewan. You could see for miles, and some of these miles were our territory.

One day, an interesting letter from the branch office arrived. I hurried out to where John was working on the tractor. The letter invited us to be special pioneers in Red Lake, Ontario. Not knowing where that was, we quickly got out maps to find it.

What a contrast it proved to be to the open prairies! Now we experienced huge forests and little towns built near gold mines. As we were looking for accommodations the first day, a little girl heard our conversation with her neighbor. She ran home to her mother, who kindly offered us lodging overnight. The bed was in a dirt cellar. The next day, we located a place, a two-room log house with no plumbing and no furniture, just a wood-burning tin heater. We got a few things at a secondhand shop and soon felt quite content.

There was no congregation within 130 miles (209 km). Many workers in the gold mines had come from Europe, and they asked if we could



When I was a special pioneer in Red Lake, Ontario

get them a Bible in their language. In a short time, we had 30 excellent Bible studies. Within six months, a small congregation was formed.

The husband of one woman with whom we studied phoned his priest to come and set his wife straight. During the encounter, the priest said that we should be teaching the Trinity, among other things. The woman got their Catholic Bible and asked the priest to back up the things he was saying. He flung the Bible across the table, saying that he did not need to prove anything. As he left, he said in Ukrainian that they should throw us out of the house and never let us in again. He did not realize that John understood Ukrainian!

Shortly thereafter, we left Red Lake because John was to be trained for the circuit work. About a year later, however, when John was giving the baptism talk at a district convention, that husband was among the baptismal candidates! The episode with the priest had caused him to begin looking into the Bible for himself.

BUSY IN THE TRAVELING WORK

In the circuit work, we had the unique pleasure of staying with many different families. We

became very close to those who shared their home and life with us. Once, we were in an upstairs room that had no heat in the winter. Early in the morning, we would hear the elderly sister quietly enter our room to light a fire in the tiny stove. Soon, she would return with a basin and warm water so that we could prepare for the day. I learned much from her quiet, gentle ways.

The traveling work helped me to draw closer to Jehovah. One circuit in Alberta included a mining town in the Far North, where a sister lived. How did Jehovah's organization view that isolated sister? Every six months, we flew there to spend a week in service and to hold meetings with her, just as with a large city congregation. It was a warm reminder of Jehovah's tender care for each little sheeplike one.

We kept in touch with many who provided accommodations for us. That reminds me of one of the first gifts John gave me—a colorful box full of writing paper. We thoroughly enjoyed keeping in touch with friends by mail, using such writing material. I still treasure that letter box.

While we were in a circuit in Toronto, a brother from the Canada Bethel phoned to ask if we would consider coming to Bethel. When did he want the answer? "Tomorrow if possible!" He got it.

BETHEL SERVICE

Each change of assignment had shown us various aspects of the pleasantness that comes at Jehovah's hand. That continued when we moved to Bethel in 1977. Association with some of the anointed ones allowed us to see not only their different personalities but also their high regard for God's Word.

The new routine at Bethel felt good. For example, our clothes were now in a drawer rather than in a suitcase, and we be-

longed to one congregation. Besides working at my assignment, taking visiting groups on tour was always a happy experience for me. I would explain the work being done at Bethel, hear the comments of the visiting brothers, and answer their questions.

Years passed quickly, and in 1997, John was invited to attend the School for Branch Committee Members at Patterson, New York. Thereafter, we were asked if we would consider moving to Ukraine. We were encouraged to think it over carefully and prayerfully. By the end of that evening, we knew that our answer would be yes.

ANOTHER CHANGE—UKRAINE

We had attended the large international convention in St. Petersburg, Russia, in 1992, and then the one in Kiev, Ukraine, in 1993. Those had attracted us to our brothers in Eastern Europe. Our new accommodations in Lviv, Ukraine, were on the second floor of an old home. The windows overlooked a yard that had a little garden, a big red rooster, and a brood of hens. It felt almost like being on a Saskatchewan farm. Twelve of us lived in that home. We had an early morning ride across the city each day to work at Bethel.

How did we feel about being in Ukraine? It was humbling to sit among many who had gone through trials, bans, and imprisonments. Yet, they had kept their faith strong. When we commended them, they would say, "We did it

With John in Ukraine, 2002



for Jehovah." They never felt that they were left on their own. Even now, if you thank someone for a kindness, he or she may reply, "Thank Jehovah," acknowledging the Source of all good things.

In Ukraine, many walk to the meetings, so they have time to talk and encourage one another. The walk might be an hour or more. There are over 50 congregations in Lviv, 21 of which use a big Kingdom Hall complex. On Sundays, it is a very beautiful sight to see a steady flow of brothers coming to the meetings.

We quickly felt at ease with the brothers and sisters, who have a gentle manner and are eager to care for others. When I have a problem understanding the language, which I still do, they are very patient. Their eyes often express as much as their words.

An example of the real trust among our brothers came during the 2003 international convention in Kiev. We had just gone down to the platform of the busy underground metro system when a young girl walked over to us and quietly said, "I'm lost. I can't find my grandma." The girl had seen our badge cards and knew that we were Witnesses. She was so brave and did not cry. A circuit overseer's wife who was with us gently took the girl to the Lost and Found Department at the stadium. Soon the girl was reunited with her grandma. I was very touched by the wonderful trust that this little girl had, even in a crowd of thousands of people.

Brothers from many countries came to Ukraine in May 2001 for the dedication of our new branch facilities. After the special talk at a stadium on Sunday morning, a sea of brothers came walking up the road to tour the new Bethel. What an unforgettable sight! I was quite moved to see these brothers, who were so quiet and orderly. It deepened my appreciation for the pleasantness that comes with serving God.



*"There was never a time
in our life that we regretted
the choices we had made"*

A DRASTIC CHANGE

Sadly, in 2004, John was diagnosed with cancer. We went to Canada for his treatment. The first session of chemotherapy was almost too much for his system, and he spent some weeks in intensive care. Thankfully, he regained consciousness. Though he could hardly speak, his eyes always showed appreciation for all who visited him.

But he was not able to recover, and he died that fall. I felt that a very big part of me was missing. John and I had so enjoyed serving Jehovah together. What would I do? I chose to return to Ukraine. I have been very grateful for the warm love of the Bethel family and of the congregation there.

There was never a time in our life that we regretted the choices we had made. It has been a pleasant life, with the best of association. I know that there is still much to learn about Jehovah's goodness, and I do hope to continue in his service forever because I truly have found 'pleasantness at Jehovah's right hand.'

How Do You Give Advice?

Have you ever been asked to give advice to others? For example, have you ever been asked such questions as: ‘What should I do? Should I go to this gathering? pursue this career? associate with this person with a view to marriage?’

Sincere people may ask you for help in making decisions—decisions that may influence their relationship with friends, family, or even Jehovah. On what will you base your reply? What is your custom in giving advice to others? Whether the topic appears trivial or weighty, “the heart of the righteous one meditates so as to answer,” says Proverbs 15:28. Consider how the following five Bible principles can help as to giving advice.



1

Discern the Real Situation.

“When anyone is replying to a matter before he hears it, that is foolishness on his part and a humiliation.”—PROV. 18:13.

In order to give good advice, we must understand the circumstances and viewpoint of the one seeking assistance. To illustrate: If someone called you and asked for the best way to get to your home, what would you need to know in order to help? Could you advise him of the best route to take without first knowing his present location? Of course not! Likewise, providing proper guidance requires discerning the present “location”—the circumstances and viewpoint—of the one seeking direction. Could there be extenuating circumstances that might affect our response? Without proper knowledge of a situation, we might give advice that causes a person to become even more confused.—Luke 6:39.

Determine How Much Research He Has Done.

It may also be wise to ask the person seeking advice such questions as: “What Bible principles do you think apply?” “What are the apparent advantages and disadvantages of the options before you?” “What research have you already done?” “What help have others, such as the congregation elders, your parents, or your Bible study conductor, already provided for you?”

The answers may help us to discern how much effort the person has already put into finding an answer. Also, our counsel will take into account what others may already have said. We may also discern whether the person is basically seeking a counselor who will ‘tickle his ears’ with the advice he wants to hear.—2 Tim. 4:3.

2

Avoid Hasty Responses.

"Every man must be swift about hearing, slow about speaking."

—JAS. 1:19.

With good intentions, we may respond quickly. But would that usually be wise, especially if we are discussing a topic we have not thoroughly researched? Proverbs 29:20 says: "Have you beheld a man hasty with his words? There is more hope for someone stupid than for him."

Take the time to make sure that your approach is in full harmony with godly wisdom. Ask yourself, 'Have the thinking and "spirit of the world" worked their way into my thinking?' (1 Cor. 2: 12, 13) Remember that good intentions alone may not be enough. The apostle Peter, after he learned of Jesus' difficult assignment, advised Jesus: "Be kind to yourself, Lord; you will not have this destiny at all." What can we learn from Peter's reaction? That if not careful, even a sincere person could promote, "not God's thoughts, but those of men." (Matt. 16:21-23) How important to think before we speak! After all, is not our own experience severely limited when compared with God's wisdom?—Job 38:1-4; Prov. 11:2.

3

Humbly Apply God's Word.

"I do nothing of my own initiative; but just as the Father taught me I speak these things."—JOHN 8:28.

Will you say, "If I were you, I would . . ."? Even if the answer to the inquiry seems obvious, you would do well to learn from the pattern of humility and modesty that Jesus left. He had far greater wisdom and experience than any other human; yet, he said: "I have not spoken out of my own impulse, but the Father himself . . . has given me a commandment as to what to tell and what to speak." (John 12:49, 50) Jesus' teachings and advice were always based on his Father's will.

For example, we read at Luke 22:49 that Jesus' disciples asked for direction on whether they should fight when he was about to be arrested. One disciple used a sword. Notice from the parallel account at Matthew 26:52-54 that even under those circumstances, Jesus took time to reason with the disciple on Jehovah's will. Aware of the principles found at Genesis 9:6 and the prophecies of Psalm 22 and Isaiah 53, Jesus was able to give wise direction that no doubt saved lives and pleased Jehovah.



Family Worship Project

As a study project, why not do research to find answers to questions that have been posed to you recently? What articles and Bible principles can you locate that could assist someone asking such questions? For instance, suppose a brother or a sister asks you about dating someone with marriage in view. When using the *Index* or the *Watchtower Library*, look

up the most directly related subject first. For example, in the *Index* you might look up "Dating" or "Marriage." Then scan the subtopics for relevant articles. When viewing a main heading, note whether there are any "See also" topics, which may point to a heading more directly related to your search.

4

Use Your Theocratic Library.

"Who really is the faithful and discreet slave whom his master appointed over his domestics, to give them their food at the proper time?"

—MATT. 24:45.

Jesus has appointed a trusted slave class that dispenses vital spiritual food. When you are giving advice and direction regarding important matters, do you take time to do thorough research in Bible-based publications?

The *Watch Tower Publications Index* and the *Watchtower Library** place abundant and clear information at our fingertips. What a mistake it would be to overlook this wealth of information! Thousands of topics are cited, with many articles to help someone seeking advice. How skilled are you at helping others investigate Bible principles and reason on God's Word? Just as a GPS can help a person identify where he is and guide him to his destination, so research tools can help him see the road he is on and discern how to remain on the path to life.

Many elders have trained publishers to look up articles by using the *Index* or the *Watchtower Library*, thus assisting their brothers and sisters to reason on the Scriptures. Such assistance helps publishers not only to address their immediate concerns but also to develop a habit of doing research and relying on Jehovah's spiritual provisions. In this way, they "have their perceptive powers trained to distinguish both right and wrong."—Heb. 5:14.

* The *Watchtower Library* on CD-ROM is currently available in 39 languages. The *Watch Tower Publications Index* is currently available in over 45 languages.

5

Avoid Trying to Make Decisions for Others.

"Each one will carry his own load."

—GAL. 6:5.

In the end, each person needs to choose for himself which counsel and advice to follow. Jehovah allows all of us the freedom to decide whether we will be governed by his principles or not. (Deut. 30:19, 20) Some situations involve several Bible principles, and ultimately, the person seeking advice has to make his own decision. Based on the issue or the age of the one seeking our advice, we may also need to ask ourselves, 'Do I really have the authority to address this question?' Some matters are best referred to congregation elders or if the inquirer is a young person, to his parents.

Thanks to Jehovah's provisions through his organization, we can both give and receive the best advice. Ecclesiastes 12:11 states: "The words of the wise ones are like oxgoads, and just like nails driven in are those indulging in collections of sentences; they have been given from one shepherd." Just like "oxgoads"—pointed sticks used to guide draft animals—loving and sound advice guides sincere ones in the right direction. "Nails driven in" produce stable structures. Similarly, sharing good advice can produce stable results. Wise ones 'indulge,' or find unrestrained delight, in considering "collections of sentences" that reflect the wisdom of their "one shepherd," Jehovah.

Echo the Shepherd when giving advice. What a privilege to provide a listening ear along with helpful counsel whenever we can! When truly based on Bible principles, our advice will prove to be sound and may contribute to the everlasting good of the listener.



"You people know the season, that it is already the hour for you to awake from sleep."—ROM. 13:11.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

Why is it vital that Christians stay awake spiritually?

Why should wakeful ministers listen and be observant?

What role do kindness and gentleness play in our ministry?

HELP PEOPLE TO "AWAKE FROM SLEEP"

EVERY year, thousands die because they get drowsy or even fall asleep while driving a motor vehicle. Others lose their jobs because they do not wake up in time to go to work or because they fall asleep on the job. But spiritual drowsiness can have far more serious effects. It is in this important context that the Bible says: "Happy is the one that stays awake."—Rev. 16:14-16.

² As Jehovah's great day approaches, mankind in general is sleeping in a spiritual sense. Even some of Christendom's leaders have referred to their flocks as 'sleeping giants.' What is spiritual sleep? Why is it vital that true Christians keep awake? How can we help others to awake from such sleep?

SPIRITUAL SLEEP—WHAT IS IT?

³ People who sleep are usually inactive. In contrast, those who sleep *spiritually* may be very busy—but not with spiritual matters. They may be frantically occupied with the daily anxieties of life or seeking pleasure, prestige, or wealth. With all this activity, they show little concern for their spiritual needs. People who are spiritually awake, though, realize that we live "in the last days," so they are as active as possible in doing God's will.—2 Pet. 3:3, 4; Luke 21:34-36.

⁴ **Read 1 Thessalonians 5:4-8.** Here the apostle Paul exhorts fellow believers not to "sleep on as the rest do." What did he mean? One way we can "sleep

-
1. 2. In what sense do many people need to wake up?
 3. How would you describe a person who is not spiritually awake?
 4. What is the import of the counsel: "Let us not sleep on as the rest do"?

on" is by ignoring Jehovah's moral standards. Another way we can "sleep on" is by ignoring the fact that Jehovah's time to destroy the ungodly has approached. We must make sure that such ungodly individuals do not influence us to adopt their ways and attitudes.

5 Some people imagine that there is no God who will call them to account. (Ps. 53:1) Others imagine that God is not interested in us humans, so there is no point in our being interested in him. Still others feel that belonging to a church will make them friends of God. All these people are spiritually asleep. They need to wake up. How can we help them?

WE MUST KEEP AWAKE OURSELVES

6 To be in a position to awaken others, we must be awake ourselves. What does that involve? God's Word associates figurative sleep with "works belonging to darkness"—revelries, drunken bouts, illicit intercourse, loose conduct, strife, and jealousy. (*Read Romans 13:11-14.*) Avoiding such conduct can be challenging. Vigilance is vital. A car driver who underestimates the danger of falling asleep behind the wheel may be risking his life. How important it is for a Christian to be aware that spiritual slumber can be deadly!

7 For example, a Christian might imagine that all in his territory have irrevocably rejected the good news. (Prov. 6:10, 11) He might reason, 'If no one is going to respond, why be energetic in trying to reach or help people?'

5. What types of attitudes characterize those who are spiritually asleep?

6. Why must Christians strive to stay spiritually awake?

7. How might a mistaken view of people affect us?

Granted, many might now be sleeping spiritually, but their circumstances and attitudes could change. Some do wake up and respond. And we can help them if we ourselves keep awake, such as by trying new ways to present the Kingdom message in an appealing manner. Part of our staying awake involves reminding ourselves why our ministry is vital.

WHAT MAKES OUR MINISTRY VITAL?

8 Bear in mind that whatever the current response, our preaching honors Jehovah and plays a role in the outworking of his purpose. Soon, those who do not obey the good news will undergo judicial punishment. The way people react to our preaching will be a basis for judgment. (2 Thess. 1:8, 9) Furthermore, it would be a mistake for a Christian to reason that vigorous preaching is unnecessary because "there is going to be a resurrection of both the righteous and the unrighteous." (Acts 24:15) We understand from God's Word that those who are judged as "goats" will go "into everlasting cutting-off." Our preaching expresses God's mercy, opening the way for people to change and to get "everlasting life." (Matt. 25:32, 41, 46; Rom. 10:13-15) If we did not preach, how would people have the opportunity to hear the message that can mean life?

9 Preaching the good news also benefits us. (*Read 1 Timothy 4:16.*) Have you not found that speaking about Jehovah and the Kingdom hope strengthens your faith and your love for God?

8. Why is our Christian ministry vitally important?

9. How has sharing in preaching the good news benefited both you and others?

Has it not helped you to develop Christian qualities? Does not expressing your devotion to God by sharing in the ministry contribute to your happiness? Many who have been privileged to teach the truth to others have had the joy of seeing God's spirit help such ones to improve their way of life.

BE OBSERVANT

10 Individuals' interest in the good news may be awakened in different ways. So Christian ministers must be alert observers. Jesus is our example. Being perfect, he could discern the unspoken indignation of a Pharisee, the sincere repentance of a sinful woman, and the self-sacrificing attitude of a widow. (Luke 7:37-50; 21:1-4) Jesus could respond to the spiritual need of each one. However, a servant of God does not have to be perfect to be a good observer. The apostle Paul illustrates that. He adapted his presentation so as to appeal to different groups and to people with varying attitudes.—Acts 17:22, 23, 34; 1 Cor. 9:19-23.

11 By our striving to be alert and observant like Jesus and Paul, we can discern how best to awaken interest in those we meet. For example, as you approach individuals, look for clues that indicate their culture, interests, or family situation. Perhaps you can notice what they are doing at the moment and make a polite comment about it as you initiate a conversation.

12 An alert observer tries to avoid distractions. While in the ministry, conver-

10, 11. (a) How did Jesus and Paul show themselves to be alert and observant? (b) Illustrate how being alert and observant can improve our ministry.

12. While engaging in the ministry, why should we be careful about our conversation?

sation with our partner can be upbuilding. Still, we want to remember that our purpose in engaging in the field ministry is to preach to others. (Eccl. 3:1, 7) So we should be careful that our conversation between doors does not interfere with our ministry. Discussing thoughts that we would like to share with interested ones is a good way to keep our minds focused on our objective. Also, although a cell phone may sometimes help us to be effective in our ministry, we should take steps to be sure that a phone call will not disrupt our conversation with a householder.

SHOW PERSONAL INTEREST

13 Ministers who are awake and alert listen carefully to those they meet. What questions can you pose in order to get someone in your territory to express his feelings? Is he concerned about the number of religions, the violence in the area, or the failure of governments? Can you awaken interest in spiritual matters by commenting on the marvelous design of living things or by pointing out how practical the Bible's advice is? Prayer interests people of nearly all cultures, even some atheists. Many wonder if anyone hears prayers. Others may be intrigued by the questions: Does God hear *all* prayers? If not, what should we do to be heard by God?

14 We can likely learn much about the art of initiating conversations by observing how experienced publishers do it. Notice how they avoid the appearance of interrogating or prying. How do their tone of voice and facial expression communicate their interest in un-

13, 14. (a) How can we discern what interests a person? (b) What might awaken people's interest in spiritual things?

HOW TO KEEP YOURSELF AWAKE

- Keep busy in doing God's will
- Avoid works belonging to the darkness
- Be aware of the danger of spiritual slumber
- Maintain a positive view of people in your territory
- Try new ways to preach to others
- Remember the importance of your ministry

derstanding the householder's views?
—Prov. 15:13.

KINDNESS AND SKILL

15 Do you like to be awakened from a deep sleep? Many do not react well when awakened suddenly. A gentle approach is usually preferred. The same is true regarding efforts to awaken people spiritually. For example, if someone reacts angrily to your visit, what is usually the best response? Kindly acknowledge his feelings, thank him for being frank, and calmly take your leave. (Prov. 15:1; 17:14; 2 Tim. 2:24) Your kindness may move such a person to react more positively the next time a Witness calls.

16 In other cases, you may be able to overcome a negative reaction. Someone may say, "No thank you. I have my own religion" or, "I am not interested" merely because it seems the easiest way to end the conversation. Yet, with skill and kind persistence, you may be able to raise an intriguing question that awakens the householder's interest in spiritual things.—*Read Colossians 4:6.*

17 Sometimes when we meet people who feel that they are too busy to listen, it is best to acknowledge the situation and leave. On occasion, though,

you may discern that you can say something brief and meaningful. Some brothers are able to open the Bible, read a thought-provoking text, and leave the householder with a question—all in less than a minute. Their concise presentation has at times awakened so much interest that the householder finds that he is not too busy for a brief conversation. Why not try to do that when the situation allows?

18 When we meet people during our daily activities, we can often awaken their interest in the good news if we are prepared to do informal witnessing. Many brothers and sisters carry some literature in their pocket or handbag. They may also have a specific Bible text in mind to share with others if the opportunity arises. You might speak with the service overseer or pioneers in your congregation about how you can prepare yourself to do that.

GENTLY ROUSING OUR RELATIVES

19 Naturally, we would like to help our relatives to accept the good news. (Josh. 2:13; Acts 10:24, 48; 16:31, 32) If our initial effort is rebuffed, that could dampen our enthusiasm for trying again. We might imagine that there is little we can do or say that will change

15. Why should kindness characterize our attempts to preach?

16, 17. How can we use insight in our ministry?

18. What might we do to be more effective at informal witnessing?

19. Why should we not abandon efforts to help our relatives?



their attitude. Still, events may cause a change in your relatives' life or viewpoint. Or you may have improved in your ability to explain the truth, so that you might now have a different result.

20 We should avoid being insensitive to our relatives' feelings. (Rom. 2:4) Should we not speak as kindly to them as we do to those we meet in the preaching work? Speak with mildness and respect. Without being preachy, give evidence of how the truth has affected you for the good. (Eph. 4:23, 24) Make plain how Jehovah has enriched your life, "teaching you to benefit yourself." (Isa. 48:17) Let your relatives see in you an example of Christian living.

21 Recently, a sister wrote: "I have al-

20. Why is tact important when speaking to relatives?

21, 22. Relate an experience that shows the value of persevering in efforts to help relatives spiritually.

ways tried to witness to my 13 brothers and sisters by my speech and conduct. I never let a year go by without writing to each of them. Yet, for 30 years, I have been the only Witness in the family."

22 The sister continued: "One day, I phoned one of my sisters who lives hundreds of miles away. She told me that she asked her preacher to study the Bible with her, but he never did. When I said that I would be glad to help, she said: 'All right, but I am telling you now: I will never be one of Jehovah's Witnesses.' After mailing her the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?*, I called her every few days. But she still had not opened the book. Finally, I asked her to get her book, and for about 15 minutes over the phone, we read and discussed some of the quoted scriptures. After a few more calls, she wanted to study for more than 15 minutes. Then she began calling *me* for her study, sometimes before I was even out of bed in the morning and sometimes twice a day. The next year, she got baptized, and the year after that, she began pioneering."

23 Helping people to wake up from spiritual sleep is an art and requires persistent effort. Yet, meek people are still responding to our efforts to awaken them. On average, over 20,000 people each month get baptized as Witnesses of Jehovah. So let us take to heart Paul's counsel to our first-century brother Archippus: "Keep watching the ministry which you accepted in the Lord, that you fulfill it." (Col. 4:17) The next article will help all to appreciate what it means to preach with a sense of urgency.

23. Why should we not tire out in trying to awaken people from spiritual sleep?



MAINTAIN YOUR SENSE OF URGENCY

*"Preach the word,
be at it urgently."*

—2 TIM. 4:2.

CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

Why did first-century Christians preach with urgency?

How can we maintain our sense of urgency?

Why is Kingdom preaching more urgent now than ever?

PEOPLE whose job it is to save lives usually work with a sense of urgency. For example, firefighters rush to an emergency call; they know that lives may be in danger.

² As Jehovah's Witnesses, we hope to help people to be saved. To that end, we take seriously our commission to preach the good news of the Kingdom. Of course, we do not dash about frantically. Then what did the apostle Paul mean when he gave the admonition: "Preach the word, be at it urgently"? (2 Tim. 4:2) How can we preach with urgency? And why is our work so urgent?

WHY IS OUR PREACHING URGENT?

³ When you consider what stands to be gained or lost as a result of our preaching, you probably feel an urgent need to speak to others about the good news. (Rom. 10:13, 14) God's Word says: "When I say to the wicked one: 'You will positively die,' and he actually turns back from his sin and carries on justice and righteousness, . . . he will positively keep living. He will not die. None of his sins with which he has sinned will be remembered against him." (Ezek. 33:14-16) Indeed, the Bible tells those who teach the Kingdom message: "You will save both yourself and those who listen to you."—1 Tim. 4:16; Ezek. 3:17-21.

⁴ To appreciate why Paul exhorted Timothy to preach with urgency, consider some of the context of our theme scripture. We read: "Preach the word,

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- 1, 2. What questions arise about the command to 'be at our preaching urgently'?
 3. People's accepting or rejecting the Kingdom message can bring what results?
 4. Why did apostasy make preaching in the first century urgent?

be at it urgently in favorable season, in troublesome season, reprove, reprimand, exhort, with all long-suffering and art of teaching. For there will be a period of time when they will not put up with the healthful teaching, but, in accord with their own desires, they will accumulate teachers for themselves to have their ears tickled; and they will turn their ears away from the truth." (2 Tim. 4:2-4) Jesus had foretold that an apostasy would develop. (Matt. 13:24, 25, 38) As that development approached, it was urgent for Timothy to "preach the word" even inside the congregation so that Christians would not be misled by the deceptive attractiveness of false teachings. Lives were at stake. What about today?

5 Apostasy from true worship has now grown and spread. (2 Thess. 2:3, 8) What teachings tickle people's ears today? In many places, the teaching of evolution has been promoted with religious fervor. Though evolution is usually presented in scientific language, it has become almost a secular religion, affecting how people view God and others. Another popular teaching is that God is not interested in us; thus, we do not need to be interested in him. Why are these teachings so attractive that they lull millions into spiritual sleep? They both carry the underlying message, 'You can do anything you want because you will not be called to account.' This truly is a message that has tickled the ears of many.—*Read Psalm 10:4.*

6 But there are other ways that people have their ears tickled. Some who still go to church like to have teachers who tell them, 'No matter what you do, God

5, 6. We may encounter what popular ideas in our ministry?

loves you.' Priests and pastors tickle the ears of others by convincing them that ceremonies, Masses, fiestas, and images have God's blessing. Little do these churchgoers realize the danger of their situation. (Ps. 115:4-8) Yet, if we can awaken them spiritually so that they understand the Bible's true message, they can benefit from God's Kingdom.

WHAT DOES PREACHING WITH URGENCY MEAN?

7 A conscientious surgeon must give undivided attention to his work because lives are at stake. In our Christian ministry, we can demonstrate a sense of urgency by concentrating on our work, such as by thinking about what issues, questions, or information might interest the people we meet. A sense of urgency might also lead us to adjust our schedule so as to visit people when they are more disposed to receive us.—Rom. 1:15, 16; 1 Tim. 4:16.

8 Having a sense of urgency also involves setting priorities. (*Read Genesis 19:15.*) For example, imagine that after getting your test results back, your doctor called you into his office and earnestly said to you: "Look! Your situation is urgent. You have at most a month to do something about your illness." You likely would not charge out of his office like a fireman on an emergency call. But you would probably get his recommendations, go home, and give serious thought to your priorities.

9 We can gain insight into Paul's urgency by noting what he told the el-

7. How can we demonstrate our sense of urgency?

8. What does acting with urgency usually involve?

9. Why can we say that Paul preached with urgency while in Ephesus?

ders from Ephesus about his preaching the good news in the district of Asia. (*Read Acts 20:18-21.*) Apparently from the first day he arrived, he got busy visiting people from house to house with the good news. In addition, for two years he followed a regular schedule of "daily giving talks in the school auditorium of Tyrannus." (Acts 19:1, 8-10) Clearly, Paul's sense of urgency influenced his routine. The call to 'be at our ministry urgently' is not intended to *overwhelm* us with our commission. Nevertheless, the preaching work should take priority in our lives.

¹⁰ The example of a small group of Bible Students who prior to 1914 set out to preach the good news illustrates what it means to have a sense of urgency. Although they were only a few thousand strong, they appreciated the urgency of the times and enthusiastically took up the Kingdom preaching work. They had sermons published in hundreds of newspapers and presented a program of color slides and motion pictures called the "Photo-Drama of Creation." In this way, they reached millions with the good news. If they had not had a sense of urgency, how many of us would have heard the Kingdom message?—*Read Psalm 119:60.*

BEWARE OF LOSING YOUR SENSE OF URGENCY

¹¹ Distractions can keep a person from thinking about how important the preaching work is. Satan's system is designed to get us absorbed in personal pursuits and side issues. (1 Pet. 5:8;

10. Why can we be pleased that Christians acted urgently some 100 years ago?

11. What has led some to lose their sense of urgency?

1 John 2:15-17) Some who at one time gave priority to Jehovah's service lost their sense of urgency. For instance, the first-century Christian named Demas had been a 'fellow worker' with Paul, but Demas became distracted by the ungodly system of things. Instead of continuing to give priority to strengthening his brother in a time of trouble, Demas abandoned Paul.—Philem. 23, 24; 2 Tim. 4:10.

¹² If we are to maintain our sense of urgency, we need to fight the urge to enjoy more of what life offers. We ought to work at getting "a firm hold on the real life." (1 Tim. 6:18, 19) You likely have no doubt that everlasting life on earth under God's Kingdom will provide endless opportunities to enjoy interesting activities. But for now, the opportunity to help others to survive Armageddon is unique to our time.

¹³ Given that most in the world around us are unwisely sleeping in a spiritual sense, what can help us avoid losing our sense of urgency? We can reflect on the fact that we at one time were sleeping in darkness, as it were. But we were awakened, and Christ has shone on us, as Paul pointed out. We now have the privilege of being light bearers. (*Read Ephesians 5:14.*) After mentioning that, Paul wrote: "Keep strict watch that how *you* walk is not as unwise but as wise persons, buying out the opportune time for yourselves, because the days are wicked." (Eph. 5:15, 16) Amid such wickedness, let us 'buy out the time' for activities that can keep us spiritually awake.

12. What opportunity is open now, and what opportunities will be opened to us forever?

13. Now that we have become Christians, how can we maintain our sense of urgency?

WE LIVE IN MOMENTOUS TIMES

14 The Christian ministry has always been urgent, but now it is more critical than ever. Since 1914, the composite sign described in God's Word has become clear. (Matt. 24:3-51) Mankind's survival is threatened as never before. Despite recent agreements, the superpowers still have some 2,000 nuclear warheads ready to launch. Authorities report hundreds of instances of nuclear material being "lost." Do terrorists have some of that? Observers say mankind could easily be annihilated by a war that a terrorist initiates. War, however, is not the only threat to man's existence.

15 "Climate change is the biggest global health threat of the 21st century," claims a 2009 report by *The Lancet* and University College London. It said: "Effects of climate change on health will affect most populations in the next decades and put the lives and wellbeing of billions of people at increased risk." The effect could be widespread destruction from rising sea levels, droughts, floods, epidemics, hurricanes, and wars over diminished resources. Yes, wars and disasters threaten civilization.

16 Some people might think that the threat of nuclear war could lead to events that fulfill "the sign." However, most do not understand the sign's real significance. It has been visible for decades now, which fact indicates that Christ's presence is a reality and that the end of this system of things is rapidly approaching. (Matt. 24:3) Never before have so many features of the sign been so clearly evident. It is time for people to awaken from spiritual slum-

ber. Our ministry can help awaken them.

17 Only a short time remains to prove our love for Jehovah and to finish the preaching work assigned for the last days. What Paul said to first-century Christians in Rome has even greater meaning today: "You people know the season, that it is already the hour for you to awake from sleep, for now our salvation is nearer than at the time when we became believers."—Rom. 13:11.

18 The events foretold for the last days can make individuals aware of their spiritual need. Others become conscious of man's need for help as they contemplate the failure of human governments to cope with economic disasters, nuclear threats, violent crime, or environmental destruction. Still others are made aware of their spiritual need by events in their own family, such as a health crisis, a divorce, or the death of a loved one. As we share in the ministry, we make ourselves available to help such people.

MOVED BY A SENSE OF URGENCY

19 A sense of urgency has moved many Christians to increase their share in the ministry. For example, a young Ecuadoran couple decided to simplify their life after they heard the 2006 special assembly day program "Keep Your Eye Simple." They made a list of things they did not need, and within three months they moved from their three-bedroom apartment to a single-bedroom place, sold some things, and became

17, 18. (a) How does "the season" affect us?
(b) What could move people to change their view about the Kingdom message?

19, 20. How has a sense of urgency moved many Christians to change their lifestyle?

14-16. What makes Kingdom preaching more urgent now than ever?



debt free. Soon they entered the auxiliary pioneer service and responded to the circuit overseer's suggestion that they serve with a congregation where there was a greater need.

²⁰ A North American brother writes: "When my wife and I attended an assembly in 2006, we had been baptized for 30 years. While driving home after the program, we discussed how we could apply the counsel given on simplifying our life. (Matt. 6:19-22) We owned three homes, land, luxury cars, a boat, and a motor home. Feeling that we must have looked like foolish Christians, we decided to make the full-time ministry our goal. In 2008 we joined our daughter in the regular pioneer service. What a joy it has been to work more closely with the brothers! We have been able to

serve where there is greater need. Also, the experience of doing more for Jehovah has drawn us closer to him. Especially rewarding is the privilege of seeing people's eyes light up when they hear and understand the truth of God's Word."

²¹ We know what will soon overtake this wicked system of things—"the day of judgment and of destruction of the ungodly men." (2 Pet. 3:7) Our knowledge of God's Word moves us to declare zealously the coming great tribulation and the new world to follow. We continue to feel a keen sense of urgency to bring real hope to people. By engaging in this urgent work to the full, we show true love for God and fellow man.

21. What knowledge moves us to action?



REJOICING IN OUR HOPE

"[There is] hope of the everlasting life which God, who cannot lie, promised before times long lasting." –TITUS 1:2.

BY WAY OF REVIEW

Why do we know that there is joy in heaven when one of the anointed maintains a life course of integrity?

How is the realization of the hope of the other sheep related to that of the anointed?

To see our hope fulfilled, what "holy acts of conduct" and "deeds of godly devotion" must we manifest?

J EHOVAH is "the God who gives hope." So said the apostle Paul, adding that Jehovah can 'fill us with all joy and peace by our believing, that we may abound in hope with power of holy spirit.' (Rom. 15:13) If our hope abounds in us, we will be able to endure any situation that may arise, our hearts filled with joy and peace. As with anointed Christians, such a hope will prove to be "an anchor for the soul, both sure and firm" for other Christians. (Heb. 6:18, 19) Our hope is something we can cling to during the storms of life, something that will help us not to drift into doubt or lack of faith.
–*Read Hebrews 2:1; 6:11.*

Christians living at this time of the end focus their attention on one of two hopes. The remaining members of the "little flock" of anointed Christians have the hope of immortal life in heaven as kings and priests with Christ in his Kingdom. (Luke 12:32; Rev. 5:9, 10) The far more numerous "great crowd" of "other sheep" share the hope of living forever on a paradise earth as subjects of the Messianic Kingdom. (Rev. 7:9, 10; John 10:16) The other sheep should never forget that their salvation depends on their active support of Christ's anointed "brothers" still on earth. (Matt. 25:34-40) The anointed will enter into their reward, but the hope of the other sheep will just as certainly be fulfilled. (*Read Hebrews 11:39, 40.*) First, let us examine the hope set before the anointed.

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1. How can the hope Jehovah has given us help us to endure?
 2. What two hopes are to be found among Christians today, and why are the "other sheep" interested in the hope the anointed entertain?

THE “LIVING HOPE” OF ANOINTED CHRISTIANS

3 The apostle Peter wrote two letters to anointed Christians, whom he called “the ones chosen.” (1 Pet. 1:1) He provided details of the wonderful hope granted to the little flock. In his first letter, Peter wrote: “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, for according to his great mercy he gave us a new birth to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance. It is reserved in the heavens for you, who are being safeguarded by God’s power through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last period of time. In this fact you are greatly rejoicing.”—1 Pet. 1:3-6.

4 The limited number of Christians chosen by Jehovah to be associated with Christ in the heavenly Kingdom government undergo “a new birth” as spirit-begotten sons of God. They are anointed with holy spirit to become kings and priests with Christ. (Rev. 20:6) Peter states that this “new birth” opens up to them “a living hope,” which he calls “an incorruptible and undefiled and unfading inheritance” reserved for them “in the heavens.” Small wonder that the anointed ‘greatly rejoice’ in their living hope! The realization of that hope, however, depends on their faithfulness.

5 In his second letter, Peter exhorted anointed Christians to ‘do their utmost to make their calling and choosing of themselves sure.’ (2 Pet. 1:10) They must exert themselves to develop such

3, 4. How do anointed Christians undergo “a new birth to a living hope,” and what is that hope?

5, 6. Why must anointed Christians do their utmost to make their heavenly calling sure?

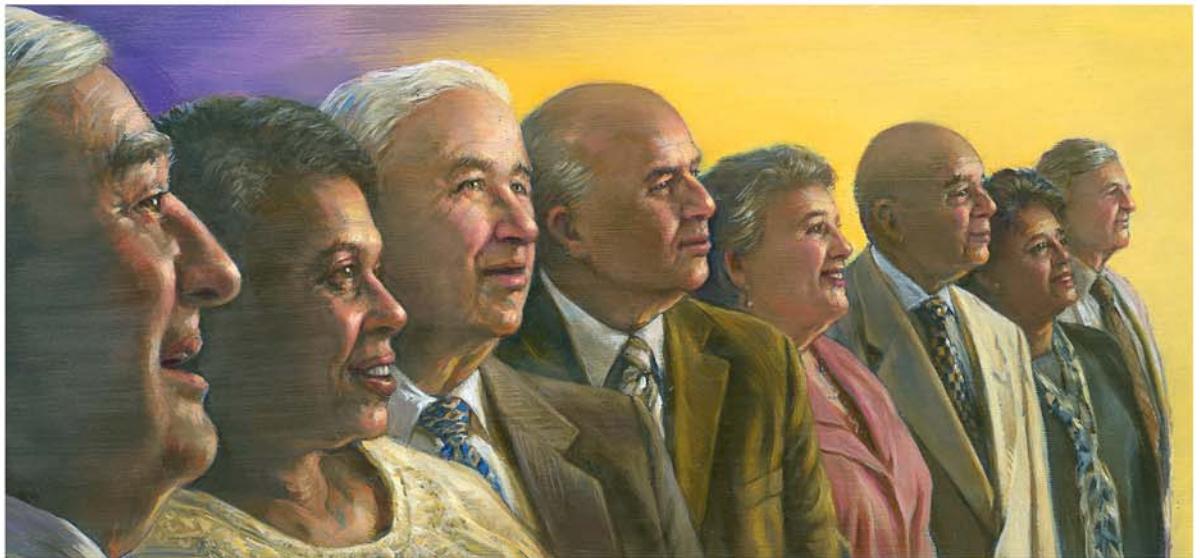
Christian qualities as faith, godly devotion, brotherly affection, and love. Peter stated: “If these things exist in you and overflow, they will prevent you from being either inactive or unfruitful.”—*Read 2 Peter 1:5-8.*

6 In his message to the spirit-begotten elders in the first-century congregation of Philadelphia in Asia Minor, the risen Christ said: “Because you kept the word about my endurance, I will also keep you from the hour of test, which is to come upon the whole inhabited earth, to put a test upon those dwelling on the earth. I am coming quickly. Keep on holding fast what you have, that no one may take your crown.” (Rev. 3:10, 11) Were an anointed Christian to become unfaithful, he would not receive “the unfadable crown of glory” promised to the chosen ones who remain faithful until death.—1 Pet. 5:4; Rev. 2:10.

AN ENTRANCE INTO THE KINGDOM

7 About the year 65 C.E., Jesus’ half brother Jude wrote a letter to his fellow anointed Christians, whom he addressed as “the called ones.” (Jude 1; compare Hebrews 3:1.) He had intended to write them a letter centering on the glorious hope of salvation that Christians called to God’s heavenly Kingdom “hold in common.” (Jude 3) Although he had other urgent issues to address, at the conclusion of his short letter, he referred to the wonderful hope shared by anointed Christians, writing: “Now to the one who is able to guard you from stumbling and to set you unblemished in the sight of his glory with great joy, to the only God our Savior through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory,

7. What wonderful hope did Jude mention in his letter?



Anointed Christians undergo “a new birth to a living hope”

majesty, might and authority for all past eternity and now and into all eternity.”

—Jude 24, 25.

8 Certainly, faithful anointed Christians want to be safeguarded against individually stumbling into destruction. Their Bible-based hope is that Jesus Christ will resurrect them from the dead, allowing them to appear in spiritual perfection before the presence of God with great joy. When one of the anointed dies faithful, it is with the sure prospect of being “raised up a spiritual body,” resurrected “in incorruption . . . , in glory.” (1 Cor. 15:42-44) If there is much “joy in heaven over one sinner that repents,” imagine the joy in the heavenly courts when one of Christ’s spirit-begotten brothers finishes a life course of integrity. (Luke 15:7) Jehovah and the faithful spirit creatures will rejoice along with the anointed one then

receiving his reward “with great joy.”

—Read 1 John 3:2.

9 In the same vein, Peter wrote to anointed Christians that if they make their calling sure by their faithfulness, “there will be richly supplied to [them] the entrance into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.” (2 Pet. 1:10, 11) Their entrance into their heavenly reward will be “richly supplied,” their Christian qualities reflecting radiantly. That it is “richly supplied” may also suggest the superlative degree of blessedness that these who have exerted themselves in the race for life will enjoy. They can look back on their faithful life course with hearts full of exultation and gratitude. This prospect undoubtedly gives the anointed Christians yet on earth strength to ‘brace up their minds for continued activity.’—1 Pet. 1:13.

8. In line with Jude 24, what indicates that there is joy in heaven when one of the anointed proves his integrity?

9. How is entrance into the Kingdom “richly supplied” to faithful anointed ones, and how does this hope affect the anointed yet on earth?

“THE BASIS OF HOPE” FOR THE OTHER SHEEP

10 The apostle Paul wrote of the glorious hope of the spirit-begotten “sons of God” as “joint heirs” of Christ. Then he mentioned the wonderful hope that Jehovah holds out to the unlimited number of other sheep: “The eager expectation of the [human] creation is waiting for the revealing of the sons of God [the anointed]. For the creation was subjected to futility, not by its own will but through him that subjected it, on the basis of hope that the creation itself also will be set free from enslavement to corruption and have the glorious freedom of the children of God.”—Rom. 8:14-21.

11 “The basis of hope” for mankind was given by Jehovah when he promised deliverance from “the original serpent,” Satan the Devil, by means of the promised “seed.” (Rev. 12:9; Gen. 3:15) That “seed” was primarily Jesus Christ. (Gal. 3:16) By his death and resurrection, Jesus provided a solid basis for mankind’s hope to be set free from enslavement to sin and death. The realization of this hope is related to “the revealing of the sons of God.” The glorified anointed ones are the secondary part of the “seed.” They will be ‘revealed’ when they share with Christ in destroying Satan’s wicked system of things. (Rev. 2:26, 27) This will bring salvation to the other sheep who come out of the great tribulation.—Rev. 7:9, 10, 14.

12 What relief will come to human “creation” during the Thousand Year

10, 11. (a) What hope is set before the other sheep? (b) How is the realization of the earthly hope related to Christ and to “the revealing of the sons of God”?

12. The revealing of the anointed will have what glorious benefits for mankind?

Reign of Christ! At that time, the glorified “sons of God” will be further ‘revealed’ when they act as priests with Christ, administering the benefits of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice to mankind. As subjects of the heavenly Kingdom, human “creation” will begin to experience deliverance from the effects of sin and death. Obedient humans will gradually “be set free from enslavement to corruption.” If they remain faithful to Jehovah throughout the Millennium and during the final test that will come at the end of it, their names will be permanently written in “the scroll of life.” They will enter into “the glorious freedom of the children of God.” (Rev. 20:7, 8, 11, 12) A glorious hope indeed!

KEEPING OUR HOPE ALIVE

13 Peter’s two inspired letters contain much to help the anointed and the other sheep to keep their respective hopes alive. He pointed out that their hope is not founded on their works, but on Jehovah’s undeserved kindness. He wrote: “Keep balanced and set your hope completely upon the undeserved kindness that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” (1 Pet. 1:13; ftn.) Christ will be revealed when he comes to reward his faithful followers and execute Jehovah’s judgments upon the ungodly.—*Read 2 Thessalonians 1:6-10.*

14 To keep our hope alive, we must focus our attention and center our lives on the coming “day of Jehovah.” That will bring the destruction of the present-day “heavens,” or human rulership, and

13. Upon what is our hope founded, and when will Christ be revealed?

14, 15. (a) To keep our hope alive, on what must we focus our attention? (b) What counsel did Peter give?

"earth," wicked human society and its "elements." Peter wrote: "What sort of persons ought you to be . . . , awaiting and keeping close in mind the presence of the day of Jehovah, through which the heavens being on fire will be dissolved and the elements being intensely hot will melt!"—2 Pet. 3:10-12.

Keep the hope alive in your family



¹⁵ The present "heavens" and "earth" will be replaced by "new heavens [Christ's Kingdom government] and a new earth [a new earthly society]." (2 Pet. 3:13) Peter then gave straightforward counsel, based on the fact of our "awaiting," or keeping our hope alive for, this promised new world: "Hence, beloved ones, since you are awaiting these things, do your utmost to be found finally by him spotless and unblemished and in peace."—2 Pet. 3:14.

WALKING IN LINE WITH OUR HOPE

¹⁶ Not only must we keep our hope alive but we must also live in harmony with our hope. We should pay attention to the sort of person we are spiritually. "Holy acts of conduct" involve our 'maintaining our conduct fine among the nations,' by our moral rectitude. (2 Pet. 3:11; 1 Pet. 2:12) We must have 'love among ourselves.' That includes doing all we can to maintain the unity of our worldwide brotherhood even among those in our local congregation. (John 13:35) "Deeds of godly devotion" are deeds that confirm our close relationship with Jehovah. This involves the quality of our prayers, as well as our daily Bible reading, deep personal study, family worship, and an active share in preaching the "good news of the kingdom."—Matt. 24:14.

¹⁷ Each of us wants to be the sort of person Jehovah approves of and will save when the present wicked system is "dissolved." We will thus experience the realization of our hope, the "hope of the everlasting life which God, who cannot lie, promised before times long lasting."—Titus 1:2.

16, 17. (a) What "holy acts of conduct" and "deeds of godly devotion" should we manifest? **(b)** How will our hope be fulfilled?



DO NOT LOOK AT “THE THINGS BEHIND”

“No man that has put his hand to a plow and looks at the things behind is well fitted for the kingdom of God.”—LUKE 9:62.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

Why should we “remember the wife of Lot”?

What three things should we avoid dwelling on?

How do we keep pace with Jehovah’s organization?

REMEMBER the wife of Lot.” (Luke 17:32) That warning given by Jesus Christ nearly 2,000 years ago is now more important than ever. But what did Jesus mean by this solemn warning? His Jewish audience needed no further explanation. They knew what had happened to Lot’s wife. While fleeing Sodom with her family, she had disobediently looked back and was turned into a pillar of salt.
—*Read Genesis 19:17, 26.*

2 But why did Lot’s wife look back? Was she curious about what was happening? Did she turn back because of disbelief or lack of faith? Or, rather, was hers a longing gaze for all the things that she had left behind in Sodom? (Luke 17:31) Whatever the reason for her looking back, she paid for her disobedient act with her life. Just think of it! She died the same day as those perverted inhabitants of Sodom and Gomorrah. No wonder Jesus said: “Remember the wife of Lot”!

3 We too are living at a time when it is vital that we do not look back in a figurative sense. Jesus emphasized this point when he answered a man who had asked if he could return to his family to say good-bye before becoming a disciple. Jesus said: “No man that has put his hand to a plow and looks at the things behind is well fitted for the kingdom of God.” (Luke 9:62) Was Jesus being harsh or unreasonable in answering this way? No, for he knew that the man’s request was merely an excuse

1. What warning did Jesus give, and what question arises?
2. Why may Lot’s wife have looked back, and what did her disobedient act cost her?
3. How did Jesus emphasize that we should not look back in a figurative sense?

to evade responsibility. Jesus described such procrastination as looking at "the things behind." Does it matter whether the person plowing looks momentarily at what is behind or actually puts down the plow and turns around? Either way he is distracted from what he should be doing, and his work may be affected negatively.

4 Rather than turning our attention to the past, we must keep our eyes focused on what is yet ahead. Notice how this is clearly expressed at Proverbs 4: 25: "As for your eyes, straight ahead they should look, yes, your own beaming eyes should gaze straight in front of you."

5 We have good reason not to look at the things behind. What is the reason? These are "the last days." (2 Tim. 3:1) We now face, not just the wiping out of two wicked cities, but the destruction of an entire world system of things. What will help us to avoid anything similar to what happened to Lot's wife? For a start, we need to identify some of the things behind us that we might be tempted to look at. (2 Cor. 2:11) Let us consider, then, what those things are and determine how we can avoid focusing on them.

THE GOOD OLD DAYS

6 One distinct danger is a distorted view of the good old days. Our memory is not always reliable. We may unwittingly minimize the problems we had in the past and at the same time exaggerate the joys, making it seem that things were a lot better than they really were.

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4. On what must we keep our eyes focused?
 5. We have what reason not to look at the things behind?
 6. Why is our memory not always reliable?



This distorted recollection can cause us to long for the good old days. But the Bible warns us: "Do not say, 'Why were the old days better than these days?' for it is not wise to ask that." (Eccl. 7:10, *New English Translation*) Why is this type of thinking so dangerous?

7 Consider what happened to the Israelites in Moses' day. Although the Israelites were initially viewed as guests in the land of Egypt, after Joseph's time the Egyptians "set over [the Israelites] chiefs of forced labor for the purpose of oppressing them in their burden-bearing." (Ex. 1:11) God's people eventually faced a type of genocide as Pharaoh attempted to limit their numbers. (Ex. 1:15, 16, 22) It is little wonder, then, that Jehovah said to Moses: "Unquestionably I have seen the affliction of my people who are in Egypt, and I have heard their outcry as a result of those who drive them to work; because I well know the pains they suffer."—Ex. 3:7.

8 Can you imagine the joy the Israelites felt as they marched out of the land of their slavery as free people? In a spectacular way, they had witnessed Jehovah's power when he brought the Ten

7-9. (a) What happened to the Israelites in Egypt? (b) The Israelites experienced what reasons for joy? (c) Over what did the Israelites begin to grumble and murmur?

Plagues upon haughty Pharaoh and his people. (*Read Exodus 6:1, 6, 7*) In fact, not only did the Egyptians finally allow the Israelites to go free but the Egyptians urged them to go, giving them so much gold and silver that it could be said that God's people "stripped the Egyptians." (Ex. 12:33-36) The Israelites further rejoiced when they saw the destruction of Pharaoh and his military forces in the Red Sea. (Ex. 14:30, 31) How faith-strengthening it should have been to witness such exciting events!

9 Unbelievably, though, within a short time of their miraculous deliverance, these same people began to grumble and murmur. About what? Food! They became dissatisfied with what Jehovah supplied and complained: "How we remember the fish that we used to eat in Egypt for nothing, the cucumbers and the watermelons and the leeks and the onions and the garlic! But now our soul is dried away. Our eyes are on nothing at all except the manna." (Num. 11:5, 6) Yes, their viewpoint had become distorted—so much so that they even wanted to return to the land of their slavery! (Num. 14:2-4) The Israelites looked at the things behind and lost Jehovah's favor.—Num. 11:10.

10 What is the lesson for us today? When faced with difficulties and problems, let us not fixate on what may appear to have been positive things in the past—perhaps even before we came to a knowledge of the truth. Although it is not wrong to meditate on the lessons we have learned from past experiences or to savor cherished memories, we need to maintain a balanced, realistic view of the past. Otherwise, we could accen-

10. The Israelites' example provides what lesson for us?

tuate our dissatisfaction with our present circumstances and be tempted to return to our former way of life.—*Read 2 Peter 2:20-22.*

PAST SACRIFICES

11 Sad to say, some look back on sacrifices they made in the past and view them as missed opportunities. Perhaps you had opportunities for higher education, for prominence, or for financial security, but you decided not to pursue them. Many of our brothers and sisters have left behind lucrative positions in the fields of business, entertainment, education, or sports. Now time has passed, and the end has not yet arrived. Do you fantasize about what could have happened had you not made those sacrifices?

12 The apostle Paul gave up much to become a follower of Christ. (Phil. 3:4-6) How did he feel about the things he had left behind? He tells us: "What things were gains to me, these I have considered loss on account of the Christ." And why? He continues: "I do indeed also consider all things to be loss on account of the excelling value of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord. On account of

11. How do some view sacrifices they made in the past?

12. How did Paul feel about the things he had left behind?



him I have taken the loss of all things and I consider them as *a lot of refuse*, that I may gain Christ.”* (Phil. 3:7, 8) Just as a person who throws away garbage, or trash, does not later bemoan his loss, Paul did not regret any of the secular opportunities that he had left behind. He no longer felt that they were worthwhile.

13 What will help us if we find ourselves starting to speculate about so-called missed opportunities? Follow the example set by Paul. How? Consider the value of what you have now. You have gained a treasured relationship with Jehovah and have established a faithful record with him. (Heb. 6:10) What material advantages can the world offer that would come anywhere near the spiritual blessings that we now enjoy and will enjoy in the future?—*Read Mark 10:28-30.*

14 Paul next mentions something that will help us to continue to go on faithfully. He says that he was “forgetting the things behind and stretching forward to the things ahead.” (Phil. 3:13) Notice that Paul highlights two steps, both necessary. First, we have to forget the things we left behind, not wasting precious energy and time being overly concerned about them. Second, like a runner at the finish line, we need to stretch forward, keeping focused on what lies ahead.

15 When we meditate on the exam-

* The original-language word here translated “refuse” also meant what “is thrown to the dogs,” “dung,” “excrement.” One Bible scholar says that Paul’s use of this word denotes a “resolute turning aside from something worthless and abhorrent with which one will have nothing more to do.”

13, 14. How can we follow the example set by Paul?

15. What benefit do we gain when we meditate on the examples of faithful servants of God?

ples of faithful servants of God—whether past or present—we can gain additional motivation to keep moving forward rather than looking at the things behind. For example, if Abraham and Sarah had kept remembering Ur, “they would have had opportunity to return.” (Heb. 11:13-15) But they did not return there. Moses originally left behind far more in Egypt than any other individual Israelite later did. Yet, there is no record of his longing for those things. Instead, the Bible account tells us that “he esteemed the reproach of the Christ as riches greater than the treasures of Egypt; for he looked intently toward the payment of the reward.”—Heb. 11:26.

PAST NEGATIVE EXPERIENCES

16 Not all past experiences, though, may appear positive. Perhaps we are overwhelmed by thoughts of past sins or mistakes that we made. (Ps. 51:3) We might still feel the sting of strong counsel that we received. (Heb. 12:11) Injustices—real or perhaps perceived—may dominate our thinking. (Ps. 55:2) What can we do to make sure that we do not allow such experiences to make us focus on the things behind? Consider three examples.

16. How may we be affected by past experiences?



17 Past mistakes. The apostle Paul described himself as “a man less than the least of all holy ones.” (Eph. 3:8) Why did he feel that way? “Because I persecuted the congregation of God,” he says. (1 Cor. 15:9) Can you imagine how Paul must have felt when he met up with some whom he had formerly persecuted? However, rather than allowing these negative thoughts to overwhelm him, Paul focused on the undeserved kindness that had been shown to him. (1 Tim. 1:12-16) The resulting gratitude that he felt spurred him on in his ministry. His former sinful conduct was included in the things that Paul was determined to forget. If we too focus on the mercy Jehovah has shown us, we will avoid having our strength sapped by undue anxiety over past events that we cannot change. We can use our strength for the work at hand.

18 Painful counsel. What if we are tempted to look back resentfully at some counsel that we received? This can be not only painful but also debilitating—causing us to “give out.” (Heb. 12:5) Whether we “belittle” the counsel because we reject it or we “give out” because we accept it and then give up, the result is the same—we do not truly allow the counsel to benefit and refine us. How much better to heed Solomon’s words: “Take hold on discipline; do not let go. Safeguard it, for it itself is your life.” (Prov. 4:13) Like a driver who obeys road signs, let us accept

17. (a) Why did Paul describe himself as “a man less than the least of all holy ones”? (b) What helped Paul not to be overwhelmed by negative thoughts?

18. (a) What may happen if we look back negatively at counsel that we received? (b) How can we heed Solomon’s words on accepting counsel?

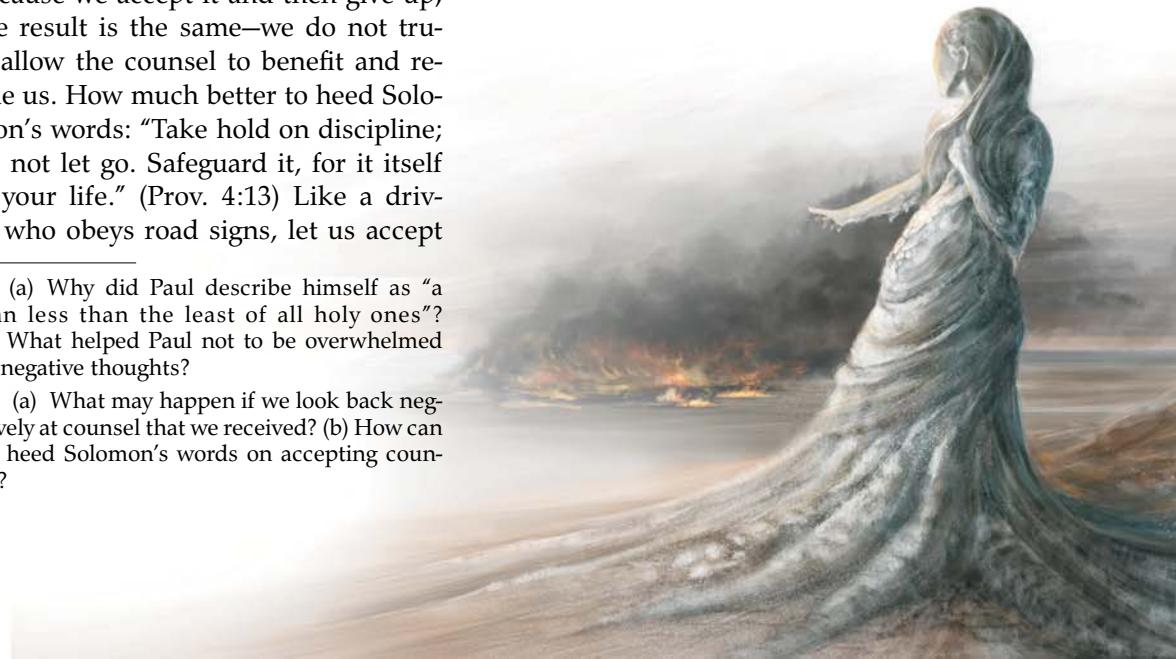
the counsel, apply it, and move forward.—Prov. 4:26, 27; *read Hebrews 12:12, 13.*

19 Injustices—real or perceived. We may at times feel like the prophet Habakkuk, who cried out to Jehovah for justice, not understanding why Jehovah had allowed certain unfair things to happen. (Hab. 1:2, 3) How important it is for us to imitate the faith of that prophet, who said: “Yet, as for me, I will exult in Jehovah himself; I will be joyful in the God of my salvation.” (Hab. 3: 18) Like Jeremiah of old, if we keep “a waiting attitude” with full faith in Jehovah, the God of justice, we can be confident that all things will be rectified at the right time.—Lam. 3:19-24.

20 We live in exciting times. Wonderful events are happening now and more lie just ahead. May each one of us keep pace with Jehovah’s organization. Let us heed the Scriptural counsel to look forward and not to look at the things behind. We will thereby prove that we do “remember the wife of Lot”!

19. How can we imitate the faith of Habakkuk and Jeremiah?

20. How can we prove that we “remember the wife of Lot”?



Could a Christian's practice of viewing pornography become so bad that it results in his being expelled from the Christian congregation?

■ Yes, it could. That underscores why it is vital to shun vigorously all pornography—both written material and images—in magazines, in films, in videos, and on the Internet.

Pornography is found everywhere around the globe. The Internet makes pornographic material more available than ever and has increased the number affected by this terrible plague. Some, young and old, have accidentally come across pornographic Web sites. Others have deliberately gone to them, feeling less inhibited because they can read or view pornography in secret—at

home or at the office. Why should this seriously concern Christians?

We find a fundamental reason in Jesus' warning: "Everyone that keeps on looking at a woman so as to have a passion for her has already committed adultery with her in his heart." (Matt. 5:28) Of course, normal sexual relations are proper and a source of pleasure between marriage mates. (Prov. 5:15-19; 1 Cor. 7:2-5) But that is not the focus of pornography. Rather, it features illicit sex that stimulates the sort of immoral thoughts that Jesus warned against. Plain-



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ly, reading or viewing pornography goes directly contrary to the divine direction: "Deaden, therefore, your body members that are upon the earth as respects fornication, uncleanness, sexual appetite, hurtful desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry."—Col. 3:5.

What if a Christian did view pornography on an occasion or two? His case might, in a sense, be likened to the dangerous situation in which the psalmist Asaph once found himself: "As for me, my feet had almost turned aside, my steps had nearly been made to slip." How could the Christian have a clean conscience and be at peace with God if he was gazing at pornographic images of naked men or women or of a couple engaging in fornication? Nor was Asaph at peace: "I came to be plagued all day long, and my correction is every morning."—Ps. 73:2, 14.

A Christian caught up in that badness should wake up and face his need for spiritual help. That help is available in the congregation: "Even though a man takes some false step before he is aware of it, you who have spiritual qualifications try to readjust such a man in a spirit of mildness, as you each keep an eye on yourself." (Gal. 6:1) A Christian elder or two could give him the help he needs, including 'prayers of faith that can make the indisposed one well, and his sin can be forgiven.' (Jas. 5:13-15) Those who have sought help to remove the stain of pornography have seen that drawing near to God has been good for them, as it was for Asaph.—Ps. 73:28.

However, the apostle Paul said that some who sinned did not repent "over their uncleanness and fornication and loose conduct."^{*} (2 Cor. 12:21) Regarding the Greek term there rendered "uncleanness," Professor Marvin R. Vincent wrote that it has "the sense of impurity on the side of sordidness." It is a sad fact that some pornography is much worse than scenes of nakedness or of a man and woman engaging in fornication.

* As to distinctions between "uncleanness and fornication and loose conduct," see *The Watchtower* of July 15, 2006, pages 29-31.

There is sordid, abhorrent pornography involving homosexuality (sex between those of the same gender), group sex, bestiality, child pornography, gang rape, the brutalizing of women, bondage, or sadistic torture. Some in Paul's day who were "in darkness mentally" came to be "past all moral sense [and] gave themselves over to loose conduct to work *uncleanness of every sort with greediness.*"—Eph. 4:18, 19.

Paul also mentioned "uncleanness" at Galatians 5:19. A British scholar noted that it "may here [signify] more especially all unnatural lusts." What Christian would deny that the above-mentioned abhorrent, sexually degrading forms of pornography are "unnatural lusts" and are sordid? Paul concluded at Galatians 5:19-21 that "those who practice" such uncleanness "will not inherit God's kingdom." Consequently, if someone developed an entrenched practice of viewing abhorrent, sexually degrading pornography, perhaps over a considerable period of time, and would not repent and turn around, he could not remain in the Christian congregation. He would have to be disfellowshipped in order to preserve the cleanliness and spirit of the congregation.—1 Cor. 5:5, 11.

It is good to know that some who fell into viewing abhorrent forms of pornography went to the elders and received the spiritual help needed to make drastic changes. Jesus appealed to Christians in ancient Sardis: "Strengthen the things remaining that were ready to die, . . . continue mindful of how you have received and how you heard, and go on keeping it, and repent. Certainly unless you wake up, . . . you will not know at all at what hour I shall come upon you." (Rev. 3:2, 3) It is possible to repent and be snatched out of the fire, as it were.—Jude 22, 23.

How much better, though, it is for each of us to be firmly resolved not to come anywhere near that dangerous position. Yes, we should be absolutely determined to avoid all forms of pornography!

“Would You Please Take Our Picture?”

After the second day of a district convention, Josué, a Bethelite in Mexico, was touring the city of Querétaro. Colombian tourists Javier and Maru, a married couple, asked Josué to take their picture. Because he and his Witness friends were well-dressed and were wearing convention badges, the couple asked them if they had come from a graduation or another special occasion. Josué explained that they were attending a convention of Jehovah’s Witnesses and invited the couple to attend the Sunday session.

The couple felt that they would be too embarrassed to attend because they had no proper attire for such an occasion. Nonetheless, Josué gave them his name and the telephone number of the branch office where he served.

To Josué’s surprise, four months later he heard from Javier. The couple had attended the convention and now wanted to have Jehovah’s Witnesses visit them in Mexico City, where they were residing at the time. Soon a Bible study was started with Javier and Maru, and they immediately began attending meetings. Ten months later, they were publishers. Though the couple had to move to Toronto, Canada, they continued to make spiritual progress and were baptized.

Later, Josué received a letter from Javier explaining what had moved him to accept the truth. “Before attending the convention, my wife and I had spoken of our need for spiritual guidance. When we saw how well-dressed you were, we thought that you must have been to

a very special meeting. At the convention, we were impressed by the loving way we were shown to our seats, by the help offered to follow along in the Bible, and by the conduct of those in attendance. It did not seem to matter that we were dressed as tourists.”

How true the words of wise King Solomon proved to be for Josué! Solomon wrote: “In the morning sow your seed and until the evening do not let your hand rest; for you are not knowing where this will have success, either here or there, or whether both of them will alike be good.” (Eccl. 11:6) Can you sow seed by using opportunities to tell others about an upcoming convention or a public talk? Jehovah may use you to attract those who are hungering and thirsting for spiritual guidance, as Javier and Maru were.
—Isa. 55:1.



Left to right: Alejandro Voegelin, Maru Pineda, Alejandro Pineda, Javier Pineda, and Josué Ramírez at the Mexico branch