

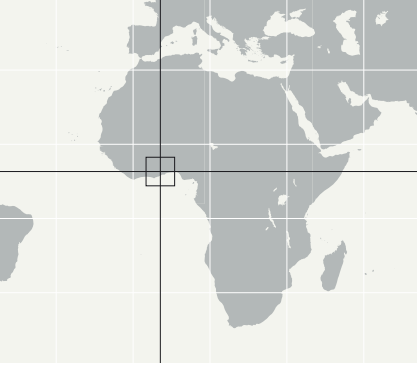
MAY 2016

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
JUNE 27–JULY 31, 2016



COVER IMAGE:

GHANA

A resourceful Kingdom proclaimer uses one of our tracts to witness to fellow students. She lives in the town of Ho in the Volta region of Ghana

PUBLISHERS
125,443

BIBLE STUDIES
382,408

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE
(2014)
347,725

TABLE OF CONTENTS

3 WEEK OF JUNE 27–JULY 3 Settle Differences in a Spirit of Love

Because of our inherited imperfection, we are sure to face situations that cause ill feelings. This article shows how Bible principles can be applied in order to settle differences with others.

8 WEEK OF JULY 4-10 “Go, . . . and Make Disciples of People of All the Nations”

This article discusses evidence that Jehovah’s Witnesses are the only people on earth today who are fulfilling Jesus’ prophetic words found at Matthew 24:14. It also explains what is involved in becoming “fishers of men.”—Matt. 4:19.

13 WEEK OF JULY 11-17 How Do You Make Personal Decisions?

When you make personal decisions, do you simply do what feels right to you? Or do you ask others what they would do? This article explains why the best decisions are made when we allow Jehovah God’s thinking to be the determining factor.

18 WEEK OF JULY 18-24 Is the Bible Still Changing Your Life?

Do you find the refining of your Christian qualities now harder than the larger changes you made before baptism? This article explains why this challenge exists and how we can continue to cultivate godly qualities with the help of God’s Word.

23 WEEK OF JULY 25-31 Benefit Fully From Jehovah’s Provisions

This article alerts us to a trap that could cause us to miss out on beneficial spiritual provisions. We will consider how we can avoid falling into that trap, and we will learn how to benefit from all the spiritual food available to us.

28 FROM OUR ARCHIVES

30 QUESTIONS FROM READERS

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Settle Differences in a Spirit of Love

“Keep peace with one another.”—MARK 9:50.

HAVE you ever thought about the personal conflicts recorded in the Bible? Consider just the first few chapters of Genesis. Cain kills Abel (Gen. 4:3-8); Lamech kills a young man for striking him (Gen. 4:23); the shepherds of Abraham (Abram) and Lot quarrel (Gen. 13:5-7); Hagar despises Sarah (Sarai), who becomes upset with Abraham (Gen. 16:3-6); Ishmael is against everyone and everyone’s hand is against him.—Gen. 16:12.

² Why does the Bible mention such conflicts? Well, one reason is that it helps imperfect humans learn why they need to keep peace. It also shows us the way we can do this. We benefit from reading Bible accounts about real people struggling with real problems. We learn about the results of their efforts and may thus be able to apply such points to some situations we encounter in life. Indeed, all of this helps us to consider how we should or should not deal with similar issues.—Rom. 15:4.

³ This article will consider why Jehovah’s servants need to settle differences and how they can succeed in doing so. In

- 1, 2. What human struggles are featured in Genesis, and why is this of interest?
3. What topics will this article cover?

SONGS: 39, 77

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What counsel did Jesus give to help us handle differences in a spirit of love?

What questions might a Christian ask himself when deciding how to settle differences with others?

How can the three steps outlined at Matthew 18:15-17 be used to resolve some conflicts?

addition, it will refer to Scriptural principles that can help them to deal with conflict and maintain good relations with their neighbor and with Jehovah God.

WHY GOD'S SERVANTS NEED TO SETTLE DIFFERENCES

⁴ Satan is primarily responsible for the strife and differences experienced by mankind. In Eden, his argument was that each individual can and should decide what is good and what is bad, doing so independent of God. (Gen. 3:1-5) The fruits of such reasoning are plain to see. The world abounds with people and societies motivated by a spirit of independence that fosters pride, egotism, and rivalry. Anyone who allows himself to be swept along by this spirit is, in effect, accepting Satan's argument that it is the course of wisdom to pursue one's own interests regardless of how doing so may affect others. Such a selfish course leads to strife. And it is good for us to remember that "a man prone to anger stirs up strife; anyone disposed to rage commits many transgressions." —Prov. 29:22.

⁵ In contrast, Jesus taught people to seek peace, even if such a course would seem detrimental to their own interests. In his Sermon on the Mount, Jesus gave excellent advice about handling disagreements or potential conflicts. For instance, he urged his disciples to be mild-tempered, to be peacemakers, to eliminate causes for anger, to settle matters quickly, and to love their enemies. —Matt. 5:5, 9, 22, 25, 44.

4. What attitude spread throughout the world, and what has been the result?

5. How did Jesus teach people to handle disagreements?

⁶ Our efforts to serve God—through prayers, meeting attendance, field service, and other aspects of our worship—are in vain if we refuse to make peace with others. (Mark 11:25) We cannot be friends of God unless we are willing to forgive the shortcomings of others.—**Read Luke 11:4; Ephesians 4:32.**

⁷ Every Christian needs to think carefully and honestly about being forgiving and having peaceful relations with others. Do you forgive fellow believers freely? Are you happy to fellowship with them? Jehovah expects his servants to be forgiving. If your conscience tells you that you have improvements to make in this regard, prayerfully seek Jehovah's help in order to make them! Our heavenly Father will hear such humble prayers and answer them.—1 John 5:14, 15.

CAN YOU IGNORE AN OFFENSE?

⁸ Because all humans are imperfect, sooner or later someone is going to say or do something that will offend you. This is inevitable. (Eccl. 7:20; Matt. 18:7) How are you going to react? Consider what happened when the following situation developed: At a social gathering attended by some Witnesses, two brothers were greeted by a certain sister in a way that one of them considered inappropriate. When the two brothers were alone, the offended brother began to criticize the sister for what she had said. However, the other brother reminded him that she had served

6, 7. (a) Why is it important to settle personal differences promptly? (b) What questions should all of Jehovah's people ask themselves?

8, 9. What should we do if we are offended?

Jehovah loyally in difficult circumstances for 40 years; he was sure that she meant no harm. After considering this for a moment, the first brother responded, “You are right.” As a result, the issue went no further.

⁹ What does this experience show? The way you react to situations that have the potential for causing offense lies in your own hands. A loving person covers over minor transgressions. **(Read Proverbs 10:12; 1 Peter 4:8.)** Jehovah considers it “beauty” on your part “to overlook an offense.” (Prov. 19:11; Eccl. 7:9) So the first thing to ask yourself when somebody treats you in a way that could seem unkind or disrespectful is: ‘Can I overlook this? Do I really need to make an issue of it?’

¹⁰ It may be challenging to treat criticism lightly. Take the case of a pioneer, whom we will call Lucy. Negative comments had been made about her ministry and her use of time. Upset, Lucy sought the counsel of mature brothers. She relates: “Their Scriptural advice helped me to maintain the right viewpoint of others’ opinions and to focus on who matters most—Jehovah.” Lucy was encouraged by reading **Matthew 6:1-4. (Read.)** That passage reminded her that making Jehovah happy should be her goal. “Even if others make negative comments about my activity,” she says, “I remain happy, for I know that I am trying my best to receive Jehovah’s smile of approval.” After reaching this conclusion, Lucy wisely chose to overlook the negative remarks.

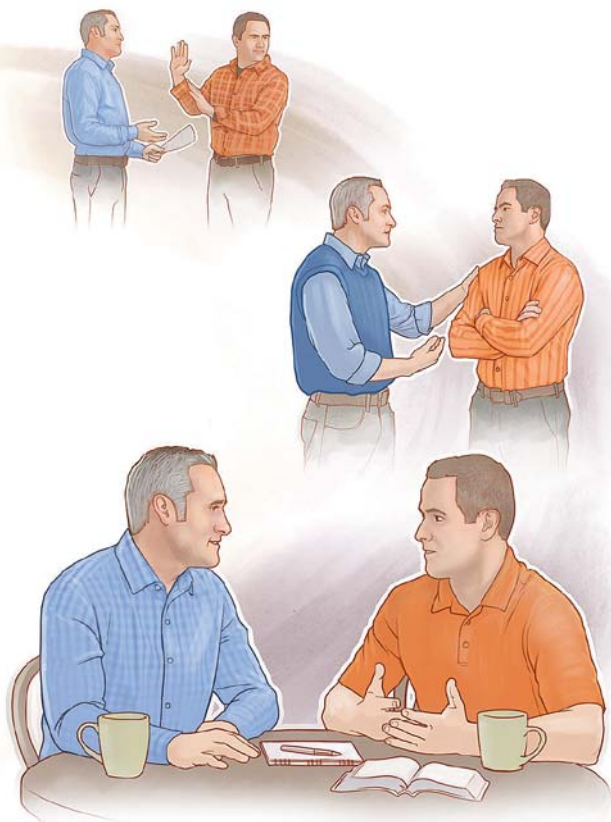
10. (a) How did one sister at first react to criticism? (b) What Scriptural thought helped this sister to maintain her peace?

WHEN YOU CANNOT OVERLOOK AN OFFENSE

¹¹ “We all stumble many times.” (Jas. 3:2) Suppose you learn that a brother was offended by something you said or did. What should you do? Jesus said: “If . . . you are bringing your gift to the altar and there you remember that your brother has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar, and go away. First make your peace with your brother, and then come back and offer your gift.” (Matt. 5:23, 24) In harmony with Jesus’ counsel, talk with your brother. Note what your objective should be. It is not to cast part of the blame on your brother but to admit your fault and *make peace*. Being at peace with our fellow worshippers is of utmost importance.

¹² A Scriptural account in which God’s servants peacefully resolved a potentially divisive issue is the one mentioned earlier involving Abraham and his nephew Lot. Both men possessed livestock, and their shepherds apparently quarreled about grazing land. Eager to eliminate tensions, Abraham offered Lot first choice of the areas where their respective households would settle. (Gen. 13:1, 2, 5-9) What a good example! Abraham sought peace, not his own interests. Did he lose out because of his generosity? Not at all. Immediately after this incident with Lot, Jehovah promised Abraham great blessings. (Gen. 13:14-17) God will never allow his servants to suffer lasting loss for acting in harmony

11, 12. (a) How should a Christian act if he believes that his brother “has something against” him? (b) What can we learn from the way Abraham handled a problem? (See opening picture.)



It may be necessary to reason
with your brother more than
once in order to gain him

(See paragraph 15)



with divine principles and settling differences in a spirit of love.^[1]

¹³ Consider a modern-day situation. When the new overseer of a convention department phoned a brother to ask if he would be able to volunteer, the brother made a number of cutting remarks and hung up. He was nursing hurt feelings over his dealings with the previous overseer. The new overseer did not take offense at this outburst, but neither could he ignore it. An hour later, he called again, mentioning that they had not yet met, and he suggested that they resolve the issues together. A week later, the two met at a Kingdom Hall. After praying, they spoke for an hour, during which the brother told his story. After listening sympathetically, the overseer shared Scriptural observations, and the two brothers parted on good terms. Thereafter, the brother served at the convention and now thanks the overseer for having dealt with him calmly and kindly.

SHOULD YOU INVOLVE THE ELDERS?

¹⁴ Most differences between Christians can and should be resolved privately by the individuals concerned. However, Jesus noted that some situations might require congregation involvement. **(Read Matthew 18:15-17.)** What would be the outcome if an offender refused to listen to his brother, to witnesses, and to the congregation?

13. How did one overseer react to harsh words, and what can we learn from his example?

14, 15. (a) When should we apply the counsel at Matthew 18:15-17? (b) What three steps did Jesus mention, and what should be our goal in applying them?

He should be treated “just as a man of the nations and as a tax collector.” Today, we would say that he should be disfellowshipped. The seriousness of this step indicates that the “sin” was not a small disagreement. Rather, it was (1) a sin that could be settled between the individuals concerned but it was also (2) a sin serious enough to merit disfellowshipping if not settled. Such sins might involve a measure of fraud or might include damaging a person’s reputation through slander. The three steps Jesus outlined here are applicable only where these conditions exist. The offense did not include such a sin as adultery, homosexuality, apostasy, idolatry, or some other gross sin definitely requiring the attention of the congregation elders.

¹⁵ The aim of Jesus’ counsel was to help a brother in a spirit of love. (Matt. 18:12-14) First, an attempt should be made to resolve the issue without involving others. It may be necessary to reason with the sinner more than once. If that fails, talk to the offender in the company of witnesses to the wrongdoing or with others who can help to determine if a wrong has really been committed. If you succeed in resolving the issue with their help, you will have “gained your brother.” A matter should be referred to the elders only when repeated efforts to help the wrongdoer have failed.

¹⁶ Cases requiring that brothers go through all three steps outlined at Matthew 18:15-17 are rare. That is encouraging, for it means that a solution is usual-

16. What shows that following Jesus’ counsel is practical and loving?

ly found before the situation reaches the point where an unrepentant sinner must be removed from the congregation. Often, the wrongdoer sees his error and corrects matters. The offended person may see that he no longer has a real reason to find fault and may prefer to forgive. Whatever the case, Jesus’ words indicate that the congregation should not get involved in disagreements prematurely. The elders may intervene only if the preceding two steps have been taken and if solid evidence can be produced to show clearly what has happened.

¹⁷ As long as this system of things lasts, humans will be imperfect and will continue to offend others. The disciple James appropriately wrote: “If anyone does not stumble in word, he is a perfect man, able to bridle also his whole body.” (Jas. 3:2) In order to settle differences, we must earnestly “seek peace and pursue it.” (Ps. 34:14) As peacemakers, we will enjoy a good relationship with our fellow believers and will promote the unity of the congregation. (Ps. 133:1-3) Above all, we will have a good relationship with Jehovah, “the God who gives peace.” (Rom. 15:33) Such blessings are enjoyed by those who settle differences in a spirit of love.

17. What blessings will we enjoy when we “seek peace” with one another?

ENDNOTE:

[1] (paragraph 12) Others who solved problems peacefully included the following: Jacob, with Esau (Gen. 27:41-45; 33:1-11); Joseph, with his brothers (Gen. 45:1-15); and Gideon, with the Ephraimites. (Judg. 8:1-3) Perhaps you can think of similar examples recorded elsewhere in the Bible.



“Go, . . . and Make Disciples of People of *All* the Nations”

“Go, . . . and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them . . . , teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you.”—MATT. 28:19, 20.

SONGS: 141, 97

HOW ARE JEHOVAH’S WITNESSES DIFFERENT CONCERNING . . .

the message they preach
and why they preach it?

the methods they use?

the scope of their work?

WHETHER people agree with us or bitterly oppose us, few would deny that as a group Jehovah’s Witnesses are well-known for their preaching activities. It may even be that you have met people in your ministry who have stated that while they disagree with our beliefs, they respect us for the work we do. As we know, Jesus foretold that the good news of the Kingdom would be preached in all the inhabited earth. (Matt. 24:14) But how do we know that the work we do is in fulfillment of Jesus’ prophecy? Is it presumptuous on our part to think that we are the ones who are doing this work?

² Many religious groups feel that they are preaching the Gospel, or good news. However, their efforts are often limited to personal testimonies, church services, or programs broadcast through the media—whether by means of television or on the Internet. Others point to their charitable activities or their endeavors in the fields of medicine and education. How do these claims measure up when compared

1, 2. What questions arise because of Jesus’ words found at Matthew 24:14?

with what Jesus commanded his disciples to do?

³ Were Jesus' disciples to be passive, waiting for people to come to them? Definitely not! After his resurrection, Jesus addressed hundreds of his disciples and told them: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them . . . , teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19, 20) Four actions are therefore required. We must make disciples, baptize them, and teach them, but what is the first thing we need to do? Jesus said: "Go"! With regard to this command, one Bible scholar commented: "To 'go' is the task of each believer, whether across the street or across the ocean."—Matt. 10:7; Luke 10:3.

⁴ Was Jesus referring only to the individual efforts of his followers, or was he alluding to an organized campaign to preach the good news? Since one individual would not be able to go to "all the nations," this work would require the organized efforts of many. Jesus indicated as much when he invited his disciples to become "fishers of men." (**Read Matthew 4:18-22.**) The type of fishing he referred to here was not that of a lone fisherman using a line and a lure, sitting idly while waiting for the fish to bite. Rather, it involved the use of fishing nets—a labor-intensive activity that at times required the coordinated efforts of many.—Luke 5:1-11.

⁵ To know who are preaching the good

3. According to Matthew 28:19, 20, what four things must Jesus' followers do?

4. What is involved in becoming "fishers of men"?

5. What four questions need to be answered, and why?

news today in fulfillment of Jesus' prophecy, we need to answer these four questions:

- What should be the message of the preaching work?
- What should be our motive for doing this work?
- What methods should be used?
- What should be the scope and duration of this preaching work?

The answers to these questions will help us not only to identify who are doing this lifesaving work but also to strengthen our resolve to persevere faithfully in it.—1 Tim. 4:16.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE MESSAGE?

⁶ **Read Luke 4:43.** Jesus preached "the good news of the Kingdom," and he expects his disciples to do the same. What group of people are preaching that message in "all the nations"? The answer is obvious—only Jehovah's Witnesses. Even some opposers acknowledge this fact. For example, a missionary priest once told a Witness that he had lived in many different countries and that he had asked the Witnesses in each country what message they were preaching. What answer was he given? The priest said: "They were all so stupid that they gave the same answer: 'The good news of the Kingdom.'" Far from being "stupid," however, those Witnesses were speaking in unity, as true Christians should. (1 Cor. 1:10) And they were echoing the message contained in *The Watchtower Announcing Jehovah's Kingdom*. This magazine is available in 254 languages, and an average of nearly 59 million copies of

6. Why can you be confident that Jehovah's Witnesses are preaching the right message?

each issue are produced, making it the most widely circulated magazine in the world.

⁷ The clergy of Christendom are not preaching God's Kingdom. If they do speak about the Kingdom, many refer to it as a feeling or a condition in the heart of a Christian. (Luke 17:21) They do not help people to understand that God's Kingdom is a heavenly government with Jesus Christ as Ruler, that it is the solution to all mankind's problems, and that it will soon remove all wickedness from this earth. (Rev. 19:11-21) Rather, they prefer to remember Jesus at Christmas and Easter. They seem to have no idea of what Jesus will accomplish as earth's new Ruler. Since they have lost sight of the *message* they are supposed to preach, is it any wonder that they have also lost sight of what should be the *motive* for doing this work?

WHAT SHOULD BE OUR MOTIVE FOR DOING THE WORK?

⁸ What should be the motive for doing the preaching work? It should not be to collect money and construct elaborate buildings. Jesus told his disciples: "You received free, give free." (Matt. 10:8) The Word of God should not be commercialized. (2 Cor. 2:17, ftn.) Those preaching the message should not seek personal gain for the work that they do. **(Read Acts 20:33-35.)** Despite this clear direction, most churches are sidetracked by collecting money or by making efforts to survive financially. They have to support a paid clergy, as well as

a multitude of other employees. In many cases, the leaders of Christendom have amassed great wealth.—Rev. 17:4, 5.

⁹ What is the record of Jehovah's Witnesses regarding collections? Their work is supported by voluntary donations. (2 Cor. 9:7) No collections are taken at their Kingdom Halls or conventions. Yet, last year alone, Jehovah's Witnesses spent 1.93 billion hours in preaching the good news and conducting free of charge over nine million Bible studies each month. Amazingly, not only do they go unpaid for their work but they also gladly cover their own expenses. When speaking of the work of Jehovah's Witnesses, one researcher stated: "The main goal is preaching and teaching. . . . There is no clergy, which cuts costs considerably." What, then, is our motive for doing this work? Put simply, we do this work of our own volition because we love Jehovah and we love our neighbor. This willing spirit is in fulfillment of the prophecy found at **Psalms 110:3. (Read.)**

WHAT METHODS SHOULD BE USED?

¹⁰ What methods did Jesus and his disciples use to preach the good news? They went to the people wherever they could be found—in public areas and in private homes. The preaching work included searching for deserving ones from house to house. (Matt. 10:11; Luke 8:1; Acts 5:42; 20:20) This systematic method showed impartiality.

7. How do we know that the clergy of Christendom are not preaching the right message?

8. What is the wrong motive for doing the preaching work?

9. How have Jehovah's Witnesses shown that they engage in the preaching work with the right motive?

10. What methods did Jesus and his disciples use to preach?



We preach wherever people can be found
(See paragraph 10)

¹¹ How have the churches of Christendom measured up in this regard? For the most part, church members have been happy to leave any preaching to the paid clergy. But rather than being “fishers of men,” Christendom’s clergy seem more concerned with merely keeping the “fish” they already have. True, at times certain clergymen may endeavor to stir up some form of evangelism. For example, early in the year 2001, Pope John Paul II stated in a letter: “Over the years, I have often repeated the summons to the *new evangelization*. I do so again now . . . We must revive in ourselves the burning conviction of Paul, who cried out: ‘Woe to me if I do not preach the Gospel.’” The pope then went on to say that this mission “cannot be left to a group of ‘specialists’ but must involve the responsibility of all the members of the People of God.” But how many have responded to this appeal?

¹² What has been the record of Jehovah’s Witnesses? They are the only ones who preach that Jesus has been ruling

11, 12. When it comes to preaching the good news, how do the efforts of Christendom compare with those of Jehovah’s people?

as King since 1914. As Jesus instructed, they place a high priority on the preaching work. (Mark 13:10) The book *Pillars of Faith—American Congregations and Their Partners* states: “For Jehovah’s Witnesses, the missionary focus overwhelms all other concerns.” Referring to statements made by a Witness, the author continues: “When they encounter hunger, loneliness, and ill health, they try to help, . . . but they never forget that their primary task is delivering a spiritual message about the coming end of the world and the necessity for salvation.” Jehovah’s Witnesses continue to deliver that message, using methods that Jesus and his disciples used.

WHAT SHOULD BE THE SCOPE AND DURATION OF THE WORK?

¹³ Jesus described the scope of the preaching work by saying that the good news would be preached “in *all* the inhabited earth.” (Matt. 24:14) Disciples are to be made “of people of *all* the nations.” (Matt. 28:19, 20) That entails a global work.

¹⁴ To understand how Jehovah’s Witnesses have fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy with regard to the scope of the preaching work, let us consider some facts. There are approximately 600,000 members of the clergy in the various denominations in the United States, where there are some 1,200,000 Witnesses of Jehovah. Worldwide, the Roman Catholic Church has a little over 400,000 priests. Now consider the number of Witnesses involved in the Bible-based

13. What should be the scope of the preaching work?

14, 15. What proves that Jehovah’s Witnesses have fulfilled Jesus’ prophecy with regard to the scope of the work? (See opening pictures.)

Kingdom-preaching work. Worldwide, some eight million volunteer ministers preach to people in 240 lands. What an amazing work is being accomplished, all to Jehovah's praise and glory!—Ps. 34:1; 51:15.

¹⁵ As Jehovah's Witnesses, we desire to reach as many people as possible with the good news before the end comes. For this reason, we stand out as unique with regard to the work we do in translating and publishing Bible literature. Millions of books, magazines, tracts, and convention and Memorial invitations have been distributed free of charge. We have produced various publications in more than 700 languages. Over 200 million copies of the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures* have been published in over 130 languages. Last year alone, we produced approximately 4.5 billion pieces of Bible literature. On our official website, information is available in more than 750 languages. What other group of ministers is doing a similar work?

¹⁶ How long would the foretold preaching work continue? Jesus said that this global work would continue right on through the last days, "and then the end [would] come." What other religious group has continued to preach the good news during these momentous last days? Some of those whom we meet in the ministry may say: "We have the holy spirit, but you people are doing the work." But is not the fact that we can endure in the work evidence that we have God's spirit? (Acts 1:8; 1 Pet. 4:14) From time to time, certain religious groups have tried to do what Jehovah's Witnesses regularly ac-

complish, but those efforts usually result in failure. Others engage in so-called missionary activities for a limited time and then go back to their normal routine. Still others may even try to go from door to door, but what are they preaching? The answer to that question makes it clear that they are not carrying out the work that Christ began.

WHO REALLY ARE PREACHING THE GOOD NEWS TODAY?

¹⁷ So who really are preaching the good news of the Kingdom today? With full confidence, we can say: "Jehovah's Witnesses!" Why can we be so confident? Because we are preaching the *right message*, the good news of the Kingdom. By going to the people, we are also using the *correct methods*. Our preaching work is being done with the *right motive*—love, not financial gain. Our work has the *greatest scope*, reaching out to people of all nations and languages. And we will continue to do this work *without letup*, year in and year out, until the end comes.

¹⁸ We truly marvel at what is being accomplished by God's people in these exciting times in which we live. But how is it possible for all of this to happen? The apostle Paul answers in his letter to the Philippians: "God is the one who for the sake of his good pleasure energizes you, giving you both the desire and the power to act." (Phil. 2:13) May all of us continue to be energized by our loving Father as we do our very best and fully accomplish our ministry.—2 Tim. 4:5.

17, 18. (a) Why can we be certain that Jehovah's Witnesses are the ones who are preaching the good news of the Kingdom today? (b) How is it possible for us to continue in this work?

16. How do we know that Jehovah's Witnesses have God's spirit?



How Do You Make Personal Decisions?

“Keep perceiving what the will of Jehovah is.”—EPH. 5:17.

THROUGH his written Word, Jehovah has given us a number of specific commands. For example, he forbids sexual immorality, idolatry, stealing, and drunkenness. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10) Additionally, God’s Son, Jesus Christ, gave his followers this challenging, though thrilling, command: “Go, . . . and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you. And look! I am with you all the days until the conclusion of the system of things.” (Matt. 28:19, 20) What a protection divine laws and commandments have proved to be! Obeying them has increased our self-respect, contributed to good health, and enhanced family happiness. More important, our loyal adherence to Jehovah’s commands, including the command to share in the preaching work, has brought us his approval and blessing.

² However, there are numerous situations for which the

1. What are some examples of Bible laws, and how does obeying them benefit us?
- 2, 3. (a) Why does the Bible not give us rules for every situation in life? (b) What questions will be considered in this article? (See opening picture.)

SONGS: 69, 57

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

How can our decisions affect us and others?

When the Bible does not give us a specific law, how can we know what would please Jehovah?

How can we get to know more about the way Jehovah thinks?

Bible provides no specific command. For example, the Scriptures do not contain detailed rules regarding what kind of clothing is appropriate attire for Christians. How does this reflect Jehovah's wisdom? Styles and customs vary not only in different parts of the world but also from one decade to the next. If the Bible had provided a list of acceptable styles of dress and grooming, it would now be out-of-date in that regard. For similar reasons, God's inspired Word does not provide a lot of rules designed to govern a Christian's choice of employment, health care, and entertainment. Individuals and family heads are therefore free to make decisions regarding these matters.

³ Does this mean that it does not matter to Jehovah what we choose to do when we face the challenge of making important decisions, some of which might have a profound effect on our life? Will our heavenly Father approve of any decision we make as long as it does not break a Bible law? In the absence of specific laws, how can we know what choices will please Jehovah?

DO PERSONAL DECISIONS MATTER?

⁴ Some may feel that it does not matter what we choose to do. To make wise decisions that please Jehovah, however, we must consider the laws and principles found in his written Word and comply with them. For instance, to have God's approval, we must act in harmony with his law on blood. (Gen. 9:4; Acts 15:28, 29) Prayer will help us to make decisions that relate to Scriptural principles and laws.

4, 5. How could our decisions affect us and others?

⁵ Weighty personal decisions can have quite a bearing on our spiritual health and welfare. Every choice we make will likely affect our relationship with Jehovah—either for good or for bad. A good decision will strengthen our relationship with God, whereas a bad one may damage it. Moreover, a poor decision could injure others spiritually by disturbing, or even stumbling, them or by disrupting the unity of the congregation. Indeed, our personal decisions do matter.—**Read Romans 14:19; Galatians 6:7.**

⁶ What should we do in situations that do not involve a direct Bible command? Under such circumstances, it is our personal responsibility to examine the details and make a choice that is guided, not by mere personal preference, but by what Jehovah will approve of and bless.—**Read Psalm 37:5.**

PERCEIVE JEHOVAH'S WILL

⁷ You may wonder, 'How can we know what Jehovah approves of if his Word provides no specific command on the matter?' Ephesians 5:17 states: "Keep perceiving what the will of Jehovah is." In the absence of a direct Bible law, how can we perceive the will of God? By praying to him and accepting his guidance by holy spirit.

⁸ Consider how Jesus perceived what his Father wanted him to do. On two reported occasions, Jesus first prayed and then miraculously provided food

6. What should guide our decisions?

7. Where there is no Bible law, how can we find out what Jehovah would want us to do in a certain situation?

8. How did Jesus perceive what Jehovah wanted him to do? Give an example.

for large crowds. (Matt. 14:17-20; 15:34-37) Yet, he refused to turn stones into bread when he was hungry and was tempted by the Devil in the wilderness. **(Read Matthew 4:2-4.)** Because he was familiar with his Father's thinking, Jesus knew that he should not turn the stones into bread. Yes, Jesus realized that it was not God's will that he use such power for his own personal benefit. By refusing to do so, he showed that he was relying on Jehovah for guidance and sustenance.

⁹ If we are to make wise decisions, as Jesus did, we must rely on Jehovah for guidance. We need to act in accord with these wise words: "Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. In all your ways take notice of him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not become wise in your own eyes. Fear Jehovah and turn away from bad." (Prov. 3: 5-7) Getting to know Jehovah's thinking through Bible study can help us to perceive what God would want us to do in a particular situation. The more familiar we are with Jehovah's thoughts, the more our heart will become sensitive to his guidance.—Ezek. 11:19, fn.

¹⁰ To illustrate: Imagine a married woman who is shopping. She sees a pair of shoes that she would like to have, but they are very expensive. So she asks herself, 'How would my husband feel about my spending that much money?' Likely, she already knows the answer, even though her husband is not with her. Why does she know? Because over a period of time, she has become familiar with his

way of thinking about their limited budget. As a result, she perceives what her husband's thoughts on such a purchase would be. In a comparable way, as we become progressively acquainted with Jehovah's thoughts and ways, we improve in our ability to perceive what our heavenly Father would want us to do in various circumstances.

HOW CAN YOU FIND OUT WHAT JEHOVAH THINKS?

¹¹ To acquaint ourselves with Jehovah's thinking, we need to make personal study a priority. When reading or studying God's Word, we might ask ourselves, 'What does this material reveal about Jehovah, his righteous ways, and his thinking?' We need to have an attitude like that of the psalmist David, who sang: "Make me know your ways, O Jehovah; teach me your paths. Cause me to walk in your truth and teach me, for you are my God of salvation. In you I hope all day long." (Ps. 25:4, 5) As you meditate on a Bible passage, you might consider questions like these: 'How can I apply this information in my family? Where can I apply it? At home? At work? At school? In the ministry?' Once we have determined *where* the material can be applied, it may become easier to perceive *how* we can put it to work.

¹² Another way to become more familiar with Jehovah's thinking is by paying close attention to Bible-based guidance from his organization. For example, the

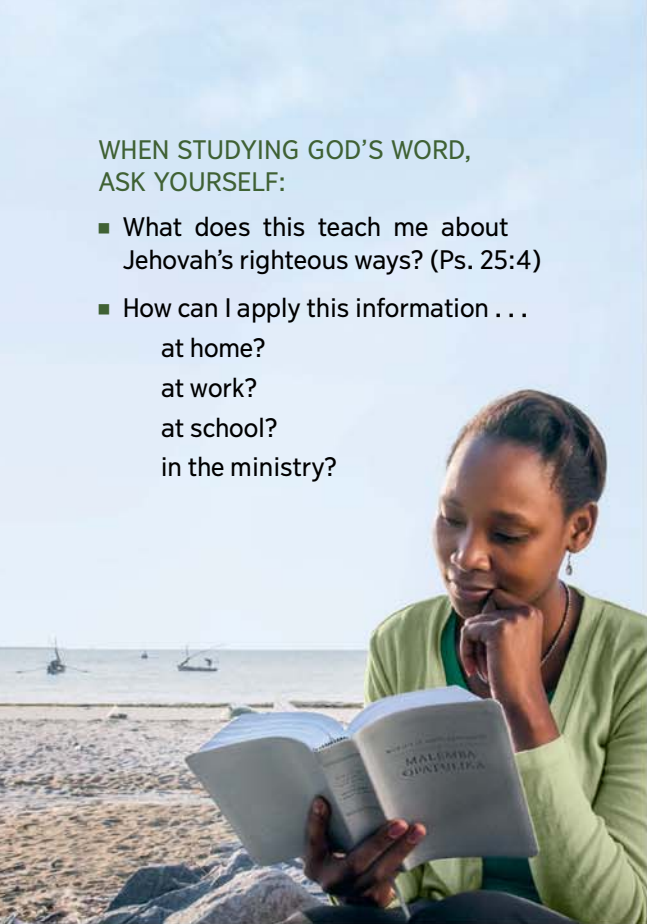
11. What questions can we ask ourselves when we read or study the Bible? (See the box "When Studying God's Word, Ask Yourself.")

12. How can our publications and meetings help us to get to know what Jehovah thinks about various matters?

9, 10. What will help us make wise decisions? Illustrate.

WHEN STUDYING GOD'S WORD,
ASK YOURSELF:

- What does this teach me about Jehovah's righteous ways? (Ps. 25:4)
- How can I apply this information . . .
 - at home?
 - at work?
 - at school?
 - in the ministry?



Watch Tower Publications Index and the *Research Guide for Jehovah's Witnesses* are produced to help us learn about Jehovah's thinking on numerous situations requiring that we make personal decisions. We also benefit greatly by listening carefully at Christian meetings and participating in them. Meditating on what is being taught will help us to discern more about Jehovah's thinking and to make his thoughts our own. By making diligent use of Jehovah's provisions for spiritual feeding, we will progressively become more familiar with his ways. As a result, we will be in a better position to make personal decisions that our loving God will bless.

LET JEHOVAH'S THINKING
GUIDE YOUR DECISIONS

¹³ Consider an example that shows how knowledge of Jehovah's thinking can help us to make wise decisions. As Kingdom publishers, we may desire to enter the full-time ministry as regular pioneers. In order to make this possible, we begin taking steps to simplify our life. At the same time, we may find ourselves worrying about whether we could be genuinely happy with less in a material way. Of course, there is no Bible command that we pioneer; we could continue serving Jehovah as faithful publishers. However, Jesus assures us that those who make sacrifices for the Kingdom will receive abundant blessings. (**Read Luke 18:29, 30.**) Moreover, the Scriptures show that it pleases Jehovah when we make "voluntary offerings of praise" to him and cheerfully do what we can to advance true worship. (Ps. 119:108; 2 Cor. 9:7) From these Scriptural points, along with prayers for guidance, can we not perceive Jehovah's thinking? Reflecting on these thoughts may help us come to a decision that will be practical for us and will have our heavenly Father's blessing.

¹⁴ Consider another example: Suppose you are drawn to a certain style of dress that could possibly disturb some in the congregation. Yet, you may know of no specific Bible law that forbids it. What is Jehovah's mind on the matter? The apostle Paul offered this inspired counsel: "The women should adorn them-

13. Give an example of how we can make a wise decision when we consider what Jehovah thinks.

14. How can you determine if a certain style of clothing is pleasing to Jehovah?

selves in appropriate dress, with modesty and soundness of mind, not with styles of hair braiding and gold or pearls or very expensive clothing, but in the way that is proper for women professing devotion to God, namely, through good works.” (1 Tim. 2:9, 10) In principle, this counsel applies equally to Christian men. As devoted servants of Jehovah, we are concerned not only with our personal preferences but with the effect that our dress and grooming could have on others. Modesty and love move us to take into account the opinions of fellow believers in order to avoid distracting or even offending them. (1 Cor. 10:23, 24; Phil. 3:17) Bearing in mind what the Scriptures say can help us perceive Jehovah’s thinking on this matter and can guide us in making decisions that please him.

¹⁵ The Bible reveals that Jehovah is saddened when people pursue a wicked course and ‘the inclination of their thoughts is only bad all the time.’ (**Read Genesis 6:5, 6.**) From this we can perceive that sexual fantasizing is wrong because it can lead to serious sin that is forbidden in the Scriptures and is out of harmony with Jehovah’s way of thinking. The disciple James wrote: “The wisdom from above is first of all pure, then peaceable, reasonable, ready to obey, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial, not hypocritical.” (Jas. 3:17) Being aware of this, we should be moved to reject entertainment that fuels impure thoughts and inclinations. Perceptive Christians do not need to ask whether it

is acceptable to be entertained by a certain book, movie, or game that features what Jehovah hates. His mind on such matters is made clear in his Word.

¹⁶ Many matters could be decided one way or another, and Jehovah would still be pleased. In the case of weighty decisions, though, it is sometimes advisable to seek counsel from the elders or the advice of other experienced Christians. (Titus 2:3-5; Jas. 5:13-15) Of course, it would be inappropriate to ask others to make a decision for us. Christians must train and exercise their powers of discernment. (Heb. 5:14) All of us should act in accord with Paul’s inspired words: “Each one will carry his own load of responsibility.”—Gal. 6:5, *ftn.*

¹⁷ When we base our decisions on Jehovah’s thinking, we draw closer to him. (Jas. 4:8) We enjoy his approval and blessing. This, in turn, strengthens our faith in our heavenly Father. Therefore, let us be guided by Bible laws and principles, for they reveal God’s mind on matters. Of course, we will always have something new to learn about Jehovah. (Job 26:14) With diligent effort, however, we can even now acquire the wisdom, knowledge, and discernment needed to make wise decisions. (Prov. 2:1-5) The ideas and plans of imperfect humans come and go, but the psalmist fittingly reminds us: “The decisions of Jehovah will stand forever; the thoughts of his heart are from generation to generation.” (Ps. 33:11) Clearly, we can make the best personal decisions when our thoughts and actions are in harmony with the thinking of our all-wise God, Jehovah.

15, 16. (a) How does Jehovah feel if we keep on thinking about sexually immoral things? (b) When we are choosing entertainment, how can we know what is pleasing to Jehovah? (c) How should weighty decisions be made?

17. How do we benefit from making decisions that please Jehovah?



Is the Bible *Still* Changing Your Life?

“Be transformed by making your mind over.”—ROM. 12:2.

SONGS: 61, 52

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

After baptism, why should we keep making changes?

Why does God expect us to put forth effort to overcome our weaknesses?

What can we do to let God’s Word keep on changing our life?

UPON learning the truth, Kevin^[1] wanted nothing more than a close relationship with Jehovah. For many years, however, he had been involved in gambling, smoking, heavy drinking, and drug abuse. In order to have God’s approval, Kevin would have to give up these unscriptural practices. This he did by relying on Jehovah and on the transforming power of His written Word.—Heb. 4:12.

² After his baptism, did Kevin stop making changes in his life? No, for he still had work to do in cultivating and refining his Christian qualities. (Eph. 4:31, 32) For example, he found that controlling his quick temper was surprisingly difficult. Kevin admitted, “Learning to control my temper was actually harder than quitting my old vices!” Kevin made needed changes through earnest prayer and intense Bible study.

1-3. (a) What changes may it be hard for us to make after our baptism? (b) When making progress is harder than we expected, what questions might we ask? (See opening pictures.)

³ Like Kevin, many of us had to make significant changes prior to our baptism in order to bring our life into harmony with the Bible's basic requirements. After baptism, we discerned the need to continue making changes—more subtle ones—so as to imitate God and Christ more closely. (Eph. 5:1, 2; 1 Pet. 2:21) For instance, we may have noted in ourselves a critical spirit, a fear of man, a tendency toward harmful gossip, or some other weakness. Has making progress in this regard proved to be harder than we expected? If so, you may wonder: 'Having made big changes already, why is it so hard for me to keep making smaller adjustments? How can I make further progress in allowing the Bible to change my life?'

HAVE REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

⁴ We who have come to know and love Jehovah desire with all our heart to do what pleases him. Regardless of how fervent that desire may be, however, our imperfect state renders us incapable of pleasing God at all times. We find ourselves in a situation like that of the apostle Paul, who wrote: "I have the *desire* to do what is fine but *not the ability* to carry it out."—Rom. 7:18; Jas. 3:2.

⁵ We have put away sinful practices that would disqualify us as members of the Christian congregation. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10) Nevertheless, we are still imperfect. (Col. 3:9, 10) It is therefore unrealistic to expect that after baptism—or even after many years in the truth—we will no

longer make mistakes, experience setbacks, or be troubled with wrong motives and inclinations. Certain tendencies might persist for years.

⁶ Our inherited imperfection does not need to prevent us from enjoying Jehovah's friendship or continuing to serve him. Consider this: When Jehovah drew us into a relationship with him, he knew that we would err at times. (John 6:44) Since God knows our traits and what is in our heart, he surely was aware of what sort of imperfect tendencies would be particularly troublesome for us. And he knew that we would occasionally transgress. Yet, this did not prevent Jehovah from wanting us as his friends.

⁷ Love moved God to offer us a precious gift—the ransom sacrifice of his beloved Son. (John 3:16) If on the basis of this priceless provision we repentantly seek Jehovah's forgiveness when we err, we can have the confidence that our friendship with him is still intact. (Rom. 7:24, 25; 1 John 2:1, 2) Should we hesitate to avail ourselves of the benefits of the ransom because we feel unclean or sinful? Of course not! That would be like refusing to use water to wash our hands when they are dirty. After all, the ransom is provided for repentant sinners. Thanks to the ransom, then, we can enjoy a friendship with Jehovah even though we are in an imperfect state. —**Read 1 Timothy 1:15.**

⁸ Of course, we do not simply ignore our weaknesses. Cultivating our friendship with Jehovah involves striving to

4. Why are we unable to please Jehovah in everything we do?

5. What changes did we make before we got baptized, but what weaknesses may we still struggle with?

6, 7. (a) What makes it possible for us to be Jehovah's friends even though we are imperfect? (b) Why should we not hold back from asking Jehovah for forgiveness?

8. Why should we not ignore our weaknesses?

imitate God and Christ more closely and being the sort of people they want us to be. (Ps. 15:1-5) It also involves endeavoring to control our imperfect tendencies, even eliminating them where possible. Whether we got baptized recently or have been in the truth for many years, we must “continue . . . to be readjusted.” —2 Cor. 13:11.

⁹ Continued effort is required in order “to be readjusted” and manifest “the new personality.” Paul reminded fellow believers: “You were taught to put away the old personality that conforms to your former course of conduct and that is being corrupted according to its deceptive desires. And you should continue to be made new in your dominant mental attitude, and should put on the new personality that was created according to God’s will in true righteousness and loyalty.” (Eph. 4:22-24) The expression “continue to be made new” indicates that putting on the new personality is an ongoing process. This is encouraging, for it assures us that regardless of how long we have been serving Jehovah, we can keep making progress in cultivating and refining the Christian qualities that make up the new personality. Yes, the Bible can continue to change our life.

WHY IS IT SO DIFFICULT?

¹⁰ We must exert ourselves if we are to allow God’s Word to continue changing us. But why is intense effort necessary on our part? If Jehovah is blessing our

9. How do we know that we can keep putting on the new personality?

10. What must we do to keep making changes with the help of the Bible, and what questions might we ask?

endeavors, should not spiritual progress come more easily? Could not Jehovah simply override our wrong inclinations to the point that we could display godly qualities with minimal effort?

¹¹ When we contemplate the physical universe, we realize that Jehovah has great power. For example, the sun changes five million tons of its matter into energy every second. Although only a small amount passes through our globe’s atmosphere, it is enough to provide adequate heat and light to sustain life on earth. (Ps. 74:16; Isa. 40:26) Jehovah is pleased to give an appropriate measure of power to his human servants when needed. (Isa. 40:29) Yes, God could even give us the strength to conquer every weakness without having to struggle with or learn from our mistakes. Why does he not do so?

¹² Jehovah has given us the peerless gift of free will. By choosing to do God’s will and by working hard to do so, we show our depth of love for Jehovah and our desire to please him. We also demonstrate our support of his sovereignty. Satan has challenged the rightfulness of Jehovah’s sovereignty, so our voluntary and vigorous efforts to uphold it are undoubtedly of special value to our benevolent and appreciative heavenly Father. (Job 2:3-5; Prov. 27:11) However, if Jehovah completely relieved us of the need to exert ourselves to fight our imperfect tendencies so as to please him, any claim of loyalty and support of his sovereignty would be meaningless.

¹³ Thus, Jehovah tells us to put forth “earnest effort” in developing godly qualities. (**Read 2 Peter 1:5-7; Col. 3:**

11-13. Why does Jehovah expect us to put forth effort to overcome our weaknesses?



It may be helpful to collect and review scriptures and articles that deal with your weaknesses
(See paragraph 15)

12) He expects us to work hard to control our thoughts and feelings. (Rom. 8:5; 12:9) Having made a genuine effort in this regard, we feel all the more satisfied when we realize that the Bible is still changing our life.

LET GOD'S WORD KEEP ON CHANGING YOU

¹⁴ What might we do to cultivate godly qualities and please Jehovah? We must do more than embark on a program of self-improvement. We need to keep exerting ourselves and following God's instructions, for Romans 12:2 states: "Stop being molded by this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, so that you may prove

14, 15. What can we do to develop qualities that Jehovah loves? (See the box "The Bible and Prayer Changed Their Lives.")

to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." By means of his Word and holy spirit, Jehovah helps us to discern his will, to do it, and to change our life to the extent necessary in order to meet his requirements. Our efforts should include such activities as daily Bible reading, meditation on the Scriptures, and prayer for holy spirit. (Luke 11:13; Gal. 5:22, 23) As we yield to the guidance of God's holy spirit and align our thinking with Jehovah's viewpoint as revealed in his Word, we will become more godly in our thoughts, words, and actions. Even then, we will need to remain on guard against succumbing to our particular weaknesses.—Prov. 4:23.

¹⁵ In addition to daily Bible reading, we need to study God's Word along with our Christian publications with a view to imitating Jehovah's wonderful qualities. Some have found it practical to collect and occasionally review certain scriptures and *Watchtower* or *Awake!* articles that are especially helpful in cultivating Christian qualities or in overcoming particular weaknesses.

¹⁶ If your spiritual progress seems slow, remember that such growth takes time. The cultivating of spiritual qualities is an ongoing process. We must be patient as we endeavor to let the Bible continue to produce positive changes in our life. At first, we may need to discipline ourselves to do what is Scripturally right. In time, though, thinking and acting in a godly way will likely become easier and more natural for us as our thoughts and actions progressively line up with those of Jehovah God.—Ps. 37:31; Prov. 23:12; Gal. 5:16, 17.

16. Why should we not be discouraged if we are not able to make changes quickly?

The Bible and Prayer Changed Their Lives

Russell was critical and demanding of his fellow worshippers. Maria Victoria loved to gossip. Linda experienced an intense fear of man whenever she engaged in the ministry. All three of these baptized Christians felt that it would be nearly impossible to change because their imperfect leanings were so strong. However, all of them have made significant progress in overcoming their weaknesses. Note what helped them.

Russell: “Supplicating Jehovah in prayer and a daily dose of Bible reading helped me. Meditating on 2 Peter 2:11 and on personal counsel from the elders made a big difference.”

Maria Victoria: “I fervently prayed to Jehovah to help me control my tongue. I also saw the need to stop having close association with people who loved to gossip. Psalm 64:1-4 made me realize that I did not want to be one from whom others pray to be safeguarded! I also came to appreciate that continuing to gossip would make me a poor example and bring reproach on Jehovah’s name.”

Linda: “I familiarized myself with our tracts so as to be prepared to offer them. Associating with those who enjoy various avenues of service has been a great help. And I continue to rely on Jehovah through prayer.”

BEAR IN MIND OUR GRAND PROSPECTS

¹⁷ Loyal worshippers of Jehovah will eventually have the privilege of serving him forever in perfection. At that time, manifesting godly qualities will no longer be a struggle but will always be an exquisite delight. Meanwhile, thanks to the ransom, we are permitted to worship our loving God. We can do so even in our present imperfect state if we continue striving to submit to the transforming power of his Word.

¹⁸ Kevin, who was mentioned earlier, worked earnestly to bring his temper under control. He meditated on and applied Bible principles, and he accepted the help and counsel offered by fellow Christians. Over the course of a few years, Kevin made significant improvement. Eventually, he qualified to be appointed as a ministerial servant, and for the past 20 years, he has been serving as a congregation elder. Even so, he sees the need to remain on guard against any spiritual relapse.

¹⁹ Kevin’s experience shows that the Bible helps God’s people to continue making positive changes in their life. Therefore, let us never give up in allowing God’s Word to keep transforming us and bringing us into a closer relationship with Jehovah. (Ps. 25:14) As we see Jehovah’s blessing on our efforts, we will have clear evidence that the Bible can keep changing our life.—Ps. 34:8.

17. If we are loyal to Jehovah, what delightful future can we look forward to?

18, 19. How can we be sure that the Bible has power to continue changing our life?

ENDNOTE:

[1] (paragraph 1) The name has been changed.



Benefit Fully From Jehovah's Provisions

“I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself.”—ISA. 48:17.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES love the Bible. It provides reliable instruction and helps us to find comfort and hope. (Rom. 15:4) We view the Bible, not as a collection of human ideas, but “just as it truthfully is, as the word of God.”—1 Thess. 2:13.

² No doubt all of us have our favorite portions of the Bible. Some especially enjoy the Gospels, which paint a beautiful picture of Jehovah's personality as reflected in his Son. (John 14:9) Others are fond of parts of the Bible containing prophecy—perhaps Revelation, with its preview of “the things that must shortly take place.” (Rev. 1:1) And who among us has not found comfort in the Psalms or drawn practical lessons from the book of Proverbs? The Bible truly is a book for everyone.

³ Because we love the Bible, we also love our Bible-based publications. For instance, we appreciate the spiritual food we receive in the form of books, brochures, magazines, and other

1, 2. (a) How do Jehovah's Witnesses feel about the Bible? (b) What is your favorite part of the Bible?

3, 4. (a) How do we feel about our publications? (b) What publications do we receive for specific groups of people?

SONGS: 117, 114

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What could cause us to miss out on the benefits of some spiritual provisions?

What suggestions can help us to benefit from all portions of the Bible?

How can we benefit from considering material directed to young people and to the public?

literature. We know that these provisions from Jehovah help us to stay spiritually alert, well-fed, and “healthy in faith.”—Titus 2:2.

⁴ In addition to publications for Jehovah’s Witnesses in general, we receive Bible-based material that appeals to specific groups. Some material is especially designed to help young people; other material assists their parents. Much of the material in print and on our website is prepared with the non-Witness public in mind. Such an abundance of spiritual food reminds us that Jehovah has kept his promise to “make for all the peoples a banquet of rich dishes.”—Isa. 25:6.

⁵ Very likely, most of us wish that we had more time to read the Bible and Bible-based publications. We can be sure that Jehovah appreciates our efforts to make “the best use of [our] time” by engaging in regular Bible reading and personal study. (Eph. 5:15, 16) Realistically, we may not always be able to give equal attention to all the spiritual food available to us. However, we need to be aware of a subtle danger. What is it?

⁶ There is a danger that we could miss out on some benefits because we assume that certain spiritual provisions do not apply to us. For example, what if a portion of the Bible does not seem relevant to our situation? Or what if we are not part of the primary audience for a certain publication? Do we tend to give such information superficial consideration or even skip it altogether? If so, we could be depriving ourselves of information that would be of great benefit to us.

5. We can be sure that Jehovah appreciates what?

6. What could cause us to miss out on the benefits of some of Jehovah’s provisions?

How can we avoid falling into that trap? Above all, each one of us should bear in mind that God is the Source of our spiritual provisions. Through the prophet Isaiah, he said: “I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself.” (Isa. 48:17) It will be helpful to consider three suggestions for benefiting from all portions of the Bible and the various types of spiritual food available to us.

SUGGESTIONS FOR BENEFICIAL BIBLE READING

⁷ **Read with an open mind.** The Bible clearly says that “*all* Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial.” (2 Tim. 3:16) True, some portions of the Bible were initially directed to one individual or group. That is why we need to read the Scriptures with an open mind. “When I read the Bible, I try to remember that there may be several lessons that can be drawn from a passage,” says one brother. He adds: “Remembering this motivates me to look beyond the obvious.” Before reading God’s Word, we do well to pray for an open mind and for wisdom to discern the lessons that Jehovah wants us to learn.—Ezra 7:10; **read James 1:5.**

⁸ **Ask questions.** As you read a Bible passage, take time to pause and ask yourself such questions as these: ‘What does this tell me about Jehovah? How can I apply this information in my life? How can I use it to help others?’ When we reflect on such questions, we will

7. Why do we need to read the Bible with an open mind?

8, 9. (a) When reading the Bible, what questions might we ask ourselves? (b) What do the qualifications for Christian elders tell us about Jehovah?

surely get more out of our Bible reading. As an example, think about the Scriptural qualifications for Christian elders. **(Read 1 Timothy 3:2-7.)** Since the majority of us do not serve as elders, we might initially think that this passage would have little application to our own life. However, when we consider a few of the many possible answers to the following questions, we will see that this list of qualifications can benefit all of us in a number of ways.

⁹ *What does this tell me about Jehovah?* By giving this list of qualifications, Jehovah reveals that he has a high standard for those who serve in an appointed capacity. He expects them to set a good example, and he holds them accountable for the way they treat the congregation, “which he purchased with the blood of his own Son.” (Acts 20:28) Jehovah wants us to feel safe in the care of the appointed undershepherds. (Isa. 32:1, 2) From that standpoint, the Scriptural qualifications for Christian elders remind us of how much Jehovah truly cares for us.

¹⁰ *How can I apply this information in my life?* From time to time, an appointed man should examine himself in the light of these spiritual qualifications, looking for areas in which he can improve. A brother who is “reaching out to be an overseer” needs to give careful attention to these qualifications, for he should strive to meet them to the best of his ability. (1 Tim. 3:1) In fact, each Christian can learn from the qualifications listed in these verses, as most of them involve things that Jehovah asks of all Christians. For instance, all of us should be reasonable and sound in mind. (Phil. 4:5; 1 Pet. 4:7) As elders prove to be “examples to the flock,” we can learn from them and “imitate their faith.”—1 Pet. 5:3; Heb. 13:7.

¹¹ *How can I use this information to help others?* We could use the list of qualifications for Christian overseers to help interested ones or Bible students to see

10, 11. (a) When reading the qualifications for elders, how can we apply the information in our own life? (b) How can we use this information to help others?

Are you getting the most out of your Bible reading?
(See paragraph 7)



ways that elders among Jehovah's Witnesses differ from the clergy of Christendom. Also, when reading through the list, we might recall the effort that elders in our own congregation are putting forth in our behalf. Reflecting on how they expend themselves deepens our "respect for those who are working hard" among us. (1 Thess. 5:12) And the more we show our sincere respect for these hardworking overseers, the more we add to their joy.—Heb. 13:17.

12 Do research. Using tools available to us, we might look for such information as the following:

- Who wrote this portion of the Scriptures?
- Where and when was it written?
- What significant events occurred when a particular Bible book was written?

Background information of this nature may bring to light lessons that are not immediately obvious.

13 For example, consider Ezekiel 14:13, 14, where we read: "If a land sins against me by acting unfaithfully, I will stretch out my hand against it and destroy its food supply, and I will send famine upon it and cut off man and animal from it. 'Even if these three men—Noah, Daniel, and Job—were within it, they would be able to save only themselves because of their righteousness,' declares the Sovereign Lord Jehovah." By doing some research, we learn that this portion of Ezekiel was written in about the year 612 B.C.E. By that time, Noah and Job had been dead for centuries, and their

12, 13. (a) Using tools available to us, what kind of research might we do? (b) Give an example of how background information may reveal lessons that are not immediately obvious.

record of faithfulness was in God's memory. But Daniel was still alive. In fact, he may have been in his late teens or early 20's when Jehovah said that he was just as righteous as Noah and Job. The lesson? Jehovah notices and values the integrity of all his faithful worshippers, including those who are relatively young.—Ps. 148:12-14.

BENEFIT FROM A VARIETY OF PUBLICATIONS

14 Just as we find it beneficial to study all portions of God's Word, we can benefit from all the spiritual food available to us. Consider a few examples. **Material for young people.** In recent years, much of our literature has been published for young people.^[1] Some of this material is designed to help them deal with the pressures at school or the challenges of adolescence. How may all of us benefit from reading such material? When we do so, we are reminded of what our faithful young people are facing. In turn, we are in a better position to help and encourage them.

15 Many of the problems addressed in material for young people are not unique to them. All of us need to defend our faith, control our emotions, reject harmful peer pressure, and avoid unwholesome associations and entertainment. These topics and many others have been addressed in material designed for teenagers. Should adult Christians feel that it is demeaning for them to read publications directed to

14. How does the material published for young people help them, and how can it benefit others too? (See opening picture.)

15. Why should adult Christians be interested in information for young people?

young people? Not at all! Although the material is presented in a way that appeals to youths, the information is based on timeless Scriptural principles, and all of us can benefit from these spiritual provisions.

¹⁶ Besides helping young people to deal with problems, our publications help them to grow spiritually and draw close to Jehovah. (**Read Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13.**) Here, too, adult Christians can benefit. For example, the April 2009 issue of *Awake!* included the article “Young People Ask . . . How Can I Make Bible Reading Enjoyable?” The article provided a number of suggestions and included a box that could be cut out and kept in the Bible for reference. Have adults also benefited from the article? “I have always struggled with Bible reading,” wrote a 24-year-old wife and mother. “I took to heart the suggestions in this article, and I am making good use of the cutout that was provided. Now I look forward to Bible reading. I can see how the books of the Bible harmonize and are interwoven like a beautiful tapestry. I have never been this excited over Bible reading.”

¹⁷ **Material for the public.** Since 2008 we have enjoyed the study edition of *The Watchtower*, which is written primarily for Jehovah’s Witnesses. But what about our magazines that are principally for the public? Can we benefit from reading these too? Consider an illustration. Imagine that one day, before the public talk, you notice that someone whom you invited has come to the King-

dom Hall. No doubt you are thrilled. As the public speaker delivers his talk, you are likely thinking about that visitor. In effect, you are hearing the talk through his ears. As a result, you come away from that talk with renewed appreciation for the subject.

¹⁸ We can experience something similar when we read material written for the public. For example, the public edition of *The Watchtower* discusses Scriptural topics in terms that a non-Witness reader can understand. The same is true of many of the articles published on jw.org, such as those in the sections entitled “Bible Questions Answered” and “Frequently Asked Questions.” When we read this information, we deepen our appreciation for familiar truths. Moreover, we may learn fresh ways to explain our beliefs when we are engaging in the ministry. Similarly, *Awake!* regularly strengthens our conviction that the true God exists, and it helps us learn how to defend our beliefs.—**Read 1 Peter 3:15.**

¹⁹ Clearly, Jehovah has given us an abundance of provisions to fill our “spiritual need.” (Matt. 5:3) May we continue to make use of all the spiritual provisions available to us. We will thereby show our gratitude to the One who teaches us to benefit ourselves.—Isa. 48:17.

19. How can we show our gratitude to Jehovah for his provisions?

16. What else do our publications help young people to do?

17, 18. How can we benefit from reading material written for the public? Give an example.

ENDNOTE:

[1] (paragraph 14) Such material includes *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volumes 1 and 2, as well as the series “Young People Ask,” which is now published exclusively online.

“To Whom the Work Is Entrusted”

AFTER days of wind and rain, Monday, September 1, 1919, dawned warm and sunny. That afternoon, fewer than 1,000 delegates gathered in the 2,500-seat auditorium for the opening session of the Cedar Point, Ohio, U.S.A., convention. By evening, 2,000 more arrived by boat, car, and special trains. On Tuesday, the crowd grew so large that the remainder of the convention program had to be held outside under stately trees.

Through the leafy dome, sunlight cast lacy patterns on the men's frock coats. A soft breeze off Lake Erie ruffled the ladies' feathered hats. "In the delightful parklike surroundings, away from the noise of the old world, it was a paradise indeed," recalled one brother.

The beauty of the surroundings paled in comparison with the radiant joy on the faces of those present. "All seem to be very devout," noted a local newspaper, "and yet extremely cheerful and jovial people." To the Bible Students, Christian fellowship tasted especially sweet after the severe trials of the past few years: wartime opposition;

bitter dissent in the congregations; the closing of Brooklyn Bethel; the imprisonment of many for the sake of the Kingdom, including eight leading brothers who had been sentenced to as long as 20 years behind bars.*

Discouraged and bewildered during those difficult years, some Bible Students had left off the witness work. Most, though, had done their best to persevere in the face of official suppression. In one typical case, an investigator reported that despite stern warnings, the Bible Students he questioned insisted that they would "continue to preach the word of God to the end."

Throughout this period of test, faithful Bible Students had been "watching the Lord's leading, . . . praying at all times for the Father's guidance." Now they were reunited in joyful assembly here at Cedar Point. One sister echoed the feelings of many who had wondered how they would "start the wheels of active service humming again."

* See *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom*, chap. 6, "A Time of Testing (1914-1918)."



More than anything else, they wanted to get to work!

“GA”—A BRAND-NEW TOOL!

All week long, delegates puzzled over the letters “GA” printed on the convention program, welcome cards, and signs around the convention grounds. On Friday, “Co-Laborers’ Day,” Joseph F. Rutherford finally unveiled the mystery for the 6,000 conventioners. “GA” stood for *The Golden Age*—a new magazine for the ministry.*

Speaking of his fellow anointed Christians, Brother Rutherford said: “Beyond the time of trouble by the eye of faith they see the Golden Age of the glorious reign of the Messiah. . . . They count it as their chief duty and privilege to announce to the world the coming of the Golden Age. It is part of their God-given commission.”

The Golden Age, “a Journal of Fact, Hope, and Conviction,” would be used to open up a new method of spreading the truth—a door-to-door subscription campaign. When asked how many wished to enter that work, all in the audience leaped to their feet. Then, “with a zest and zeal known only by those who follow in the footsteps of Jesus,” they sang: “Send out thy light and

* *The Golden Age* was renamed *Consolation* in 1937 and *Awake!* in 1946.

truth, O Lord.” “I will never forget how the trees fairly shook,” recalled J. M. Norris.

After the session, delegates lined up for hours to be among the first subscribers to the magazine. Many felt as did Mabel Philbrick, who said: “How thrilling it was to know that we were again to have a work to do!”

“TO WHOM THE WORK IS ENTRUSTED”

About 7,000 Bible Students prepared for action. The flier *Organization Method* and the booklet *To Whom the Work Is Entrusted* laid out the details: A new Service Department at headquarters would direct the work. A Service Committee should be formed in the congregation and a director appointed to convey instructions. Territories were to be divided into sections of from 150 to 200 homes. A Service Meeting would be held on Thursday evenings for the brothers to share experiences and file service reports.

“Upon our return to our home bases, we all got busy with the subscription campaign,” said Herman Philbrick. They found hearing ears everywhere. “It seemed that after a war and so much sorrow, everyone welcomed even the thought of a golden age,” observed Beulah Covey. Arthur Claus wrote: “The entire congregation was greatly surprised at the large number of subscriptions that were obtained.” Within two months of its first issue, nearly half a million sample copies of *The Golden Age* had been placed, and the magazine had 50,000 subscribers.

The article “Gospel of the Kingdom,” in the July 1, 1920, issue of *The Watch Tower*, was what A. H. Macmillan later called “the first official expression of the worldwide preaching work as it is now actually being carried out.” That article urged all anointed Christians to “give a testimony to the world that the kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Today, Christ’s brothers “to whom the work is entrusted” have been joined by millions who zealously preach the word while they await the Messianic golden age.



What can help Christians determine whether it is appropriate to give gifts or tips to government employees?

■ A number of factors need to be borne in mind. Christians must be honest. They have a responsibility to obey the law of the land when this does not conflict with Jehovah's law. (Matt. 22:21; Rom. 13:1, 2; Heb. 13:18) They also strive to respect local customs and sensibilities and to 'love their neighbor as themselves.' (Matt. 22:39; Rom. 12:17, 18; 1 Thess. 4:11, 12) Applying such principles will likely affect how Christians in different parts of the world view the giving of gifts and tips.

In many places, a member of the community does not have to give anything to public employees in order to obtain what he is entitled to. Public employees perform services for which they are paid by the government, and they neither ask for nor expect to receive anything in addition to their normal wages. In many lands, it is illegal for government employees to seek or accept anything of value for an official action, even if they would be acting in what is otherwise a completely legal manner in the fulfillment of

their responsibilities. Such a gift would be considered a bribe, even if the gift did not change the outcome of the official action. Where this situation exists, the question of whether a Christian might give gifts or tips to government employees does not even arise. Such gifts are simply improper.

However, public employees in parts of the world without such laws or where such laws are not rigorously enforced do not have the same attitude toward the functions they fulfill. In some lands, government officials take advantage of their position to extort money or other favors from those whom they are supposed to serve, and they are unwilling to do anything unless they receive a gift. Tips are thus demanded by officials who legalize marriages, who accept legitimate income tax payments, who issue building permits, and so on. When tips are not forthcoming, officials may deliberately create obstacles to make it very difficult, if not impossible, for citizens to obtain what is their legal right. It is even report-



Christians must use their Bible-trained conscience when dealing with government officials

At times, it may be appropriate to offer a small token of appreciation for a legitimate service to which a person is entitled

ed that in one country, firemen who respond to emergencies will not begin to tackle a blaze unless they first receive a substantial tip.

Where the practices described above are widespread, some feel that it is impossible to avoid giving tips. In such circumstances, a Christian might view a tip as an additional fee that he is required to pay in order to obtain a legitimate service. In an environment where corruption is common, however, a Christian needs to be on guard so that the boundary between what is acceptable and what is unacceptable from God's standpoint does not become blurred for him. It is one thing to give a tip in order to obtain what one is legally entitled to, yet quite another to seek an illegal favor. In an atmosphere of corruption, some people tip an official in order to obtain a service to which they are not entitled or offer a policeman or a government inspector a "tip" in order to avoid a proper and justifiable fine. Of course, it would be wrong to seek to corrupt anyone with a "gift," just as it would also be wrong to be corrupted by accepting such a "gift." Either action would distort justice.—Ex. 23:8; Deut. 16:19; Prov. 17:23.

On the basis of their Bible-trained conscience, most mature Christians are not comfortable giving tips solicited by officials. They feel that by doing so, they would be condoning or promoting corruption. Thus, they reject requests for any kind of gift at all.

While mature Christians recognize that gift-giving to obtain an unlawful favor could be tantamount to bribery, local circumstances and sensibilities may allow some to offer a small token of appreciation to receive a legitimate service or to avoid unfair delay. In other cases, after receiving free medical treatment in a public hospital, some Christians give gifts to doctors and nurses out of



gratitude for the treatment received. They feel free to do this after the treatment has been received, rather than before, so that there can be no suggestion that the gift is intended as a bribe or a request for preferential treatment.

It is impossible to consider here every conceivable situation in every different land. Irrespective of local circumstances, therefore, when deciding how to act, Christians should pursue a course that leaves them with a good conscience. (Rom. 14:1-6) They should avoid lawless actions. (Rom. 13:1-7) They should avoid any practice that might bring reproach on Jehovah's name or stumble others. (Matt. 6:9; 1 Cor. 10:32) And their decisions should reflect their love for neighbor.—Mark 12:31.

How can the congregation express its joy when an announcement is made that someone has been reinstated?

■ In Luke chapter 15, we find Jesus' powerful illustration about a man who had a flock of 100 sheep. When one of the sheep was missing, the man left the 99 behind in the wilderness and went after the lost sheep 'until he found it.' Jesus continued: "When he has found it, he puts it on his shoulders and rejoices. And when he gets home, he calls his friends and his neighbors together, saying to them, 'Rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep that was lost.'" In conclusion, Jesus said: "I tell you that in the same way, there will be more joy in heaven over one *sinner* who repents than over 99 righteous ones who have no need of repentance."—Luke 15:4-7.

The context shows that Jesus spoke these words in order to correct the thinking of the

scribes and the Pharisees, who criticized him for associating with tax collectors and sinners. (Luke 15:1-3) Jesus pointed out that there is joy in heaven when a sinner has come to repentance. We ask, 'Since there is joy in heaven, should there not also be joy on earth when a sinner has repented, turned around, and made straight paths for his feet?'—Heb. 12:13.

When someone is reinstated in the congregation, we have good reason to rejoice. The person will have to keep on maintaining his integrity to God, but he had to be repentant in order to be reinstated, and we are glad that he repented. Accordingly, there may well be spontaneous, dignified applause when the elders make an announcement of a reinstatement.

What could have caused the water of Jerusalem's pool of Bethzatha to be "stirred up"?

■ Some inhabitants of Jerusalem in Jesus' day thought that the pool of Bethzatha had healing powers when its water was "stirred up." (John 5:1-7) As a result, people seeking a cure congregated at the site.

The pool in question has been identified as a Jewish ritual bath. Its water level was fed and maintained by drawing on the contents of an adjacent reservoir, which was part of the same complex. Investigation of the site has revealed that the two pools were divided by a dam. A sluice gate within the structure of this dam could be opened

in order to allow water to flow from the reservoir through a channel into the bottom of the ritual bath. On such occasions, the rush of water would certainly have disturbed the pool's surface.

It is noteworthy that John 5:4, which said that an angel disturbed the water, is not found in highly regarded ancient Greek manuscripts, such as the fourth-century Codex Sinaiticus. At Bethzatha, however, Jesus cured a man who had been sick for 38 years. Without even entering the pool, the man was instantly healed.



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