

OCTOBER 1, 1998

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Do You Know the Truth?

THE WATCHTOWER®

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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THE PURPOSE OF *THE WATCHTOWER* is to exalt Jehovah God as Sovereign Lord of the universe. It keeps watch on world events as these fulfill Bible prophecy. It comforts all peoples with the good news that God's Kingdom will soon destroy those who oppress their fellowmen and that it will turn the earth into a paradise. It encourages faith in God's now-reigning King, Jesus Christ, whose shed blood opens the way for mankind to gain eternal life. *The Watchtower*, published by Jehovah's Witnesses continuously since 1879, is nonpolitical. It adheres to the Bible as its authority.

IN THIS ISSUE

- 3 "The Truth Will Set You Free"
- 4 Worshiping God With Truth
- 7 Kingdom Proclaimers Report
- 8 "Jehovah, a God Merciful and Gracious"
- 13 Imitate Jehovah's Mercy
- 19 Local Cultures and Christian Principles—Are They Compatible?

- 24 I Found Something Better Than Gold
- 28 Keep Making Spiritual Progress!
- 32 Signposts on Life's Road

WATCHTOWER STUDIES

- NOVEMBER 2-8:** "Jehovah, a God Merciful and Gracious." Page 8. Songs to be used: 1, 88.
- NOVEMBER 9-15:** Imitate Jehovah's Mercy. Page 13. Songs to be used: 215, 216.

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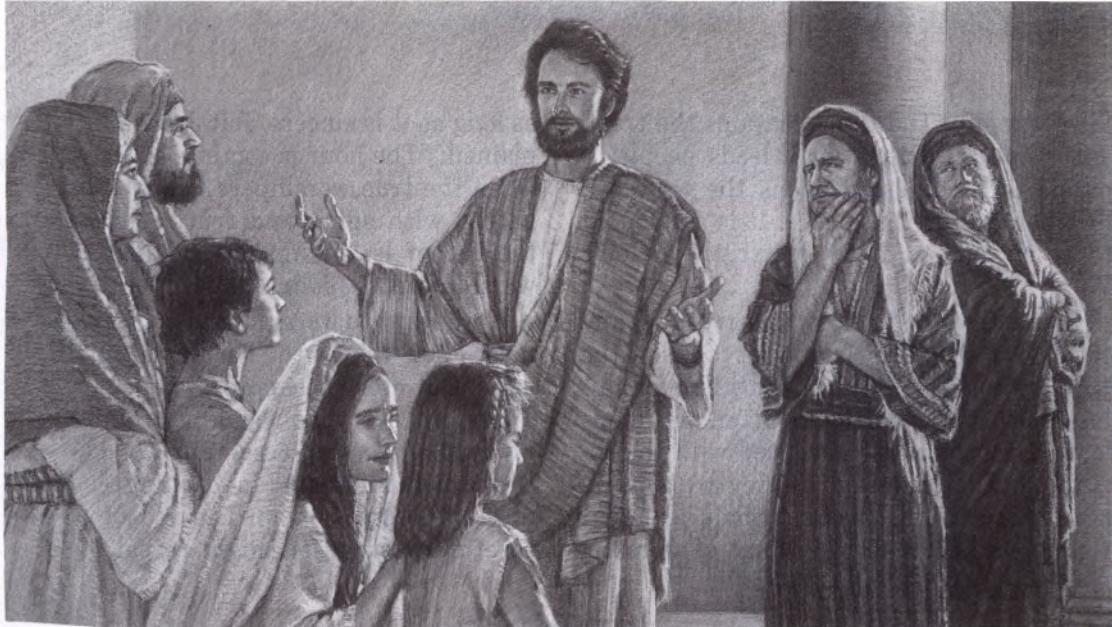
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"THE TRUTH WILL SET YOU FREE"

"You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."

So declared Jesus as he was teaching the multitudes in the temple in Jerusalem.

(John 8:32) Jesus' apostles could readily identify Jesus' teachings as the truth.

They had seen abundant evidence of their teacher's divine origin.

TODAY, however, some may find it difficult to identify the truth Jesus spoke about. As in the days of the prophet Isaiah, today there are "those who are saying that good is bad and bad is good, those who are putting darkness for light and light for darkness, those who are putting bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter." (Isaiah 5:20) With numerous opinions, philosophies, and life-styles being promoted nowadays, many people feel that everything is relative and that there is no such thing as truth.

When Jesus said to his audience that the truth would set them free, they responded by saying: "We are Abraham's offspring and never have we been slaves to anybody. How is it you say, 'You will become free'?" (John

8:33) They did not feel a need for anyone or anything to set them free. But then Jesus explained: "Most truly I say to you, Every doer of sin is a slave of sin." (John 8:34) The truth that Jesus was talking about can open the way to freedom from sin. Jesus said: "If the Son sets you free, you will be actually free." (John 8:36) So the truth that frees people is truth about Jesus Christ, the Son of God. It is only by faith in the sacrifice of Jesus' perfect human life that anyone can be freed from sin and death.

On another occasion Jesus said: "Sanctify them by means of the truth; your word is truth." (John 17:17) The word of God as expressed in the Bible is the truth that can bring freedom from superstition and

false worship. The Bible contains the truth about Jesus Christ, which leads people to put faith in him and opens the way to a bright hope for the future. It is a splendid thing to come to know the truth of God's Word!

How vital is it to know the truth? Many religions today, while claiming to follow the Bible, are largely influenced by human philosophies and traditions. Often, religious leaders seem not as concerned with the accuracy of their message as they are with its acceptance by the masses. Some feel that God is satisfied with any form of worship,

as long as it is sincere. But Jesus Christ explained: "The hour is coming, and it is now, when the true worshipers will worship the Father with spirit and truth, for, indeed, the Father is looking for suchlike ones to worship him."—John 4:23.

If we want to worship God acceptably, we must know the truth. This is an important issue. Our eternal happiness depends on it. Therefore, everyone should ask himself: 'Is my way of worship acceptable to God? Am I genuinely interested in learning the truth of God's Word? Or am I afraid of what a careful investigation might reveal?'

WORSHIPING GOD WITH TRUTH

For worship to be acceptable to God, it must be based on truth. (John 4:23)

The Bible identifies true worshipers as belonging to "the congregation of the living God, a pillar and support of the truth." (1 Timothy 3:15) The ones making up the congregation of God not only believe the truth of God's Word but also live in harmony with it and defend it, making it known throughout the earth.

—Matthew 24:14; Romans 10:9-15.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES are well-known for their Bible educational work, now being done in more than 200 lands. They study the Bible and teach it as the truth, without incorporating the diluting influence of human philosophies. Are you acquainted with their Bible-based teachings? Many hesitate to listen to Jehovah's Witnesses because of the negative information that circulates against them. But honest-hearted people are invited to decide for themselves whether what the Witnesses preach is the truth or not. Such a vital decision should not be based on hearsay. Many

who have conducted their own personal investigation of the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses have benefited greatly.

Knowledge of the Truth Dispels Fear

Consider, for example, the case of Eugenia. She was reared in a strict Catholic household. Her father was one of the organizers of the papal visit to Mexico in 1979. While visiting friends, Eugenia came in contact with Jehovah's Witnesses. With their help she began to analyze more closely what the Bible says. She recalls: "At first, fear began to well up. I had found the truth!

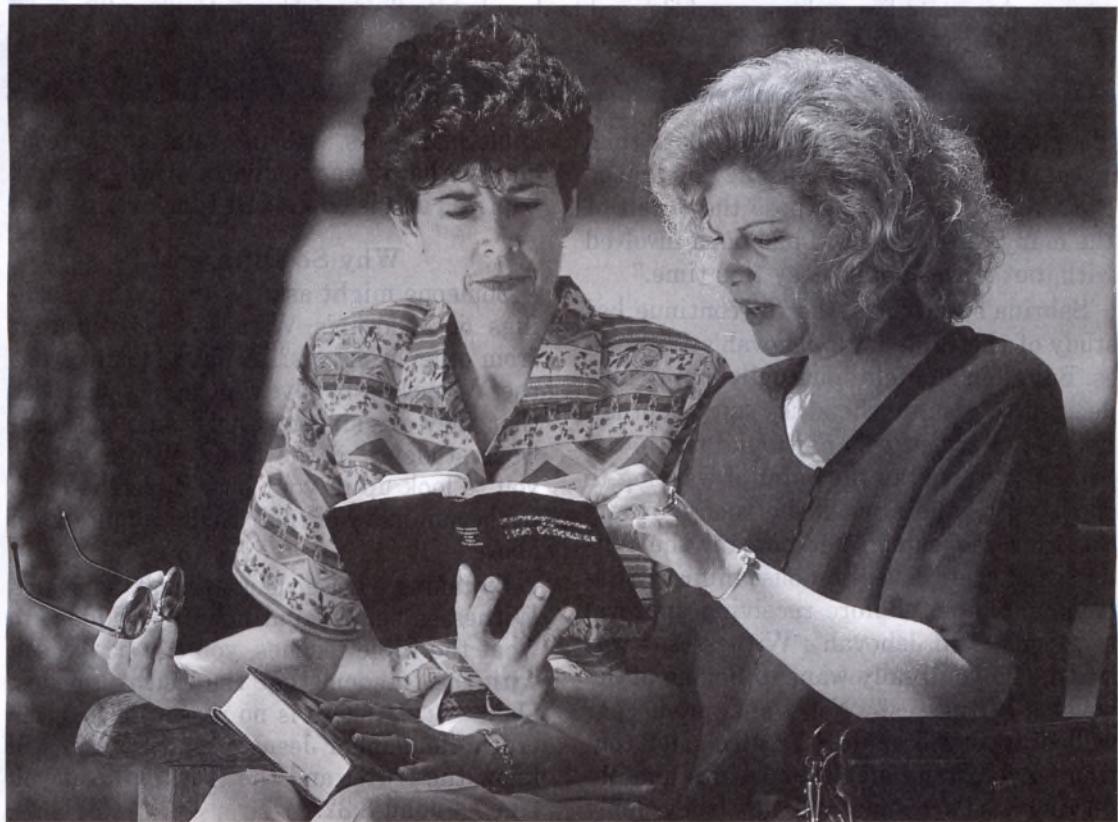
But this meant that most of my prior beliefs were wrong. My family, my friends, people whom I loved—they were all wrong. I was nervous. I kept asking myself how my family would react to what I had newly discovered. As time passed and with Jehovah's help, I began to adjust to this overwhelming experience. One day I decided to confide in a family friend, a professor of theology. I told him all about my desire to find the truth. Then he noted, 'If you want to know the truth, look for Jehovah's Witnesses.'

As Eugenia had feared, her family put her out of the house. The Witnesses, however, continued to give her spiritual help. She comments: "I was strengthened to take

a stand for the truth. I realized that it was something worth fighting for. The welcome I received from Jehovah's Witnesses was so important. I felt loved within the Christian congregation. Getting close to God's organization helped me to overcome the fear of having to stand alone."

Consider another example. Sabrina grew up accustomed to having regular family discussions about the Bible. In fact, they developed a form of 'family religion.' She made it a practice to associate with members of various religions to expose their errors. When one of Jehovah's Witnesses offered her a Bible study, she readily accepted with the intention of disproving their beliefs.

Jehovah's Witnesses make known Bible truth to people in over 200 lands



SOME BASIC BELIEFS OF JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES

- Jehovah is the almighty God. His personal name appears more than 7,000 times in the earliest manuscripts of the Bible.—Psalm 83:18.
- Jesus Christ is God's Son, who came to earth to give his life for humankind. (John 3:16, 17) Jehovah's Witnesses follow the teachings of Jesus Christ as they are found in the Gospels.
- The name Jehovah's Witnesses is based on Isaiah 43:10, which says: "'You are my witnesses,' is the utterance of Jehovah."
- The Kingdom that people pray for in the "Our Father" prayer is a heavenly government that will soon take away all the suffering and pain in the world to make room for the Paradise that the Bible promises.—Isaiah 9:6, 7; Daniel 2:44; Matthew 6:9, 10; Revelation 21:3, 4.
- Everyone who does the will of God has the opportunity to enjoy the Kingdom blessings eternally.—John 17:3; 1 John 2:17.
- Christians must mold their behavior by what the Bible says. They must endeavor to be honest, to live a clean, moral life, and to show love to their neighbor.—Matthew 22:39; John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10.

She recalls: "After studying for more than a year, I became afraid of losing 'my truth.' I had found it easy to expose the deceit of the many religions that I had been involved with, but it was not so easy this time."

Sabrina's fear made her discontinue her study of the Bible with Jehovah's Witnesses. But then she felt spiritually empty. She decided to resume the study and eventually came to accept this newfound truth. Sabrina progressed to the point of wanting to share with others what she was learning. She even requested to accompany the Witnesses in their house-to-house ministry. Sabrina explains: "Before receiving approval to preach with Jehovah's Witnesses, I was asked: 'Do you really want to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses?' 'No!' I answered. Fear welled up in me again." Finally, after continuing to attend all the meetings and observing God's people and how they apply

Bible principles, Sabrina came to the conclusion that it was really the truth. She was baptized and is now a full-time evangelizer.

Why So Different?

Someone might ask, 'Why are the teachings of Jehovah's Witnesses so different from other religions?' A brief look at what the Witnesses believe will help you to see that they are sincere Christians, conscientious students of the Bible. We encourage you to look up in your own Bible the texts in the summary of their basic beliefs shown above.

By taking a closer look at what Jehovah's Witnesses believe and how they adhere to what the Bible teaches, you can be blessed with the freedom that the truth provides. (John 17:17) There is no reason to fear the truth. Remember Jesus' promise: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."—John 8:32.

KINGDOM PROCLAIMERS REPORT

Do Not Hold Back From Declaring the Good News

WHEN European explorers first visited the Gulf of Venezuela and Lake Maracaibo, the coastline was crowded with small thatched huts built on stilts over the shallow waters. The sight was reminiscent of Venice, Italy, where people built their homes along the water's edge. The Spanish-speaking explorers thus named the area Venezuela, which means "Little Venice."

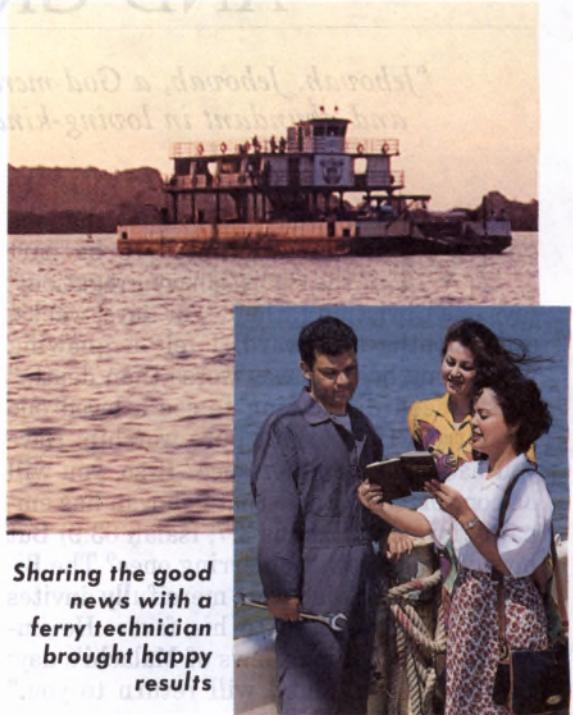
Today, this beautiful country is playing host to another kind of building program, a spiritual one. There Jehovah's Witnesses are busily engaged in sowing Kingdom seed on every appropriate occasion. The resulting spiritual harvest is bringing much praise to "the Master of the harvest," Jehovah God.—Matthew 9:37, 38.

When a traveling overseer visited a congregation in the state of Zulia in northwestern Venezuela, the local Witnesses arranged for him and his wife to visit a small island nearby called Toas. While waiting in line to catch an early morning ferry to the island, the traveling overseer's wife, Mery, suggested to her companion, a full-time pioneer sister, that they talk to some of the workers on the boat. The pioneer sister agreed.

Approaching a technician, Mery presented the book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*. She showed him the chapter "Building a Family That Honors God," which he seemed to appreciate. Mery then explained that with the use of this publication, he could have a Bible study in his own home. He accepted the book, and arrangements were made for someone to call on him at his home.

A short time later, there was a special one-day assembly in the area. What a surprise for Mery to see the technician, Senor Nava, there, along with his wife and two young daughters! Mery asked the wife what she thought about their family Bible study. Her answer was most surprising.

"I give thanks to Jehovah that we have learned the truth," she said. Then she explained. "When you spoke to my husband, he had just left me for



Sharing the good news with a ferry technician brought happy results

another woman. He was also a heavy drinker. Sometimes when he got drunk, he was abusive, which the small community on the island did not like. He also practiced spiritism. However, the Bible knowledge that he gained from the study has helped him to make enormous changes in his life. He has quit all of his unclean practices. His parents, who are Catholics, are very impressed by these changes. They are happy that he is now a responsible husband and father."

Senor Nava was baptized in 1996 and presently serves as a full-time minister. His wife, Jenny, was baptized in 1997. The mayor of the town was so impressed by the changes in this ferry mechanic that he too asked for a Bible study. How glad the sisters are that they did not hold back in declaring the good news while waiting in line for the ferry that morning!

"JEHOVAH, A GOD MERCIFUL AND GRACIOUS"

"Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth."—EXODUS 34:6.

MY DAUGHTER told me that she no longer wanted to be part of the Christian congregation,” says one Christian father. “For days, weeks, even months afterward, I felt a gnawing pain in my body. It was worse than death.” It is indeed distressing to see a loved one stray from the path of pure worship. Have you had such an experience? If so, you will be comforted to know that Jehovah has empathy for you. (Exodus 3:7; Isaiah 63:9) But how does he view such erring ones? The Bible shows that Jehovah mercifully invites them to be restored to his favor. He implored the rebellious Jews of Malachi’s day: “Return to me, and I will return to you.” —Malachi 3:7.

² God’s mercy was highlighted for Moses on Mount Sinai. There, Jehovah revealed himself as “a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth.” (Exodus 34:6) This declaration emphasizes that mercy is an intrinsic part of Jehovah’s personality. He “desires all to attain to repentance,” wrote the Christian apostle Peter. (2 Peter 3:9) Of course, God’s mercy is not limitless. “By no means will he give exemption from punishment,” Moses was told. (Exodus 34:7; 2 Peter 2:9) Nevertheless, “God is love,” and

1. (a) What comfort does the Bible provide for those who have seen loved ones stray from pure worship? (b) How does Jehovah view erring ones?
2. How does the Bible show that mercy is an intrinsic part of Jehovah’s personality?

mercy is a large facet of that quality. (1 John 4:8; James 3:17) Jehovah will not “hold onto his anger forever,” and he is “delighting in loving-kindness.” —Micah 7:18, 19.

³ Jesus was a perfect reflection of his heavenly Father. (John 5:19) His merciful treatment of wrongdoers was not a condoning of their sins but an expression of the same tender feelings he manifested toward the physically ill. (Compare Mark 1:40, 41.) Yes, Jesus placed mercy among the “weightier matters” of God’s Law. (Matthew 23:23) In contrast, consider the scribes and Pharisees, whose legalistic notions of justice usually eliminated mercy altogether. When they saw Jesus having dealings with sinners, they complained: “This man welcomes sinners and eats with them.” (Luke 15:1, 2) Jesus answered his accusers with three illustrations, each of which underscores God’s mercy.

⁴ First, Jesus told of a man who left 99 sheep to search for one that was lost. His point? “There will be more joy in heaven over one sinner that repents than over ninety-nine righteous ones who have no need of repentance.” Next, Jesus told of a woman who searched for a lost drachma coin and rejoiced upon finding it. His application? “Joy arises among the angels of God

3. How did Jesus’ view of mercy contrast with that of the scribes and Pharisees?
4. What two illustrations did Jesus relate, and what was the point of each?

over one sinner that repents.” Jesus related his third illustration in the form of a parable.* It has come to be regarded by many as the finest short story ever told. A consideration of this parable will help us appreciate and imitate God’s mercy.—Luke 15:3-10.

A Rebellious Son Leaves Home

5 “A certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said to his father, ‘Father, give me the part of the property that falls to my share.’ Then he divided his means of living to them. Later, after not many days, the younger son gathered all things together and traveled abroad into a distant country, and there squandered his property by living a debauched life.”

—Luke 15:11-13.[#]

⁶ The younger son here displayed a shocking lack of appreciation. First, he demanded his inheritance, and then he squandered it “by living a debauched life.” The expression “debauched life” is translated from a Greek word that means “riotous living.” One scholar says that the word “expresses the utmost abandonment of character.” With good reason, the young man in Jesus’ parable is often called a *prodigal*, a word that describes a person who is recklessly extravagant and wasteful.

⁷ Are there people today who resemble the prodigal? Yes. Sadly, a relatively small number have left the secure “home” of our

* Parables and other illustrations related in the Bible did not necessarily take place in actuality. Furthermore, since the purpose of these stories is to teach a moral lesson, there is no need to seek a symbolic meaning in every detail.

[#] The prophetic significance of this parable is discussed in the *Watchtower* issue of February 15, 1989, pages 16, 17.

5, 6. How did the younger son in Jesus’ third illustration display a shocking lack of appreciation?

7. Who today resemble the prodigal, and why do many such individuals seek independence in “a distant country”?

heavenly Father, Jehovah. (1 Timothy 3:15) Some of these feel that the environment of God’s household is too restrictive, that Jehovah’s watchful eye is more of a hindrance than a protection. (Compare Psalm 32:8.) Consider one Christian woman who was brought up according to Bible principles but who later became involved with abuse of alcohol and drugs. Looking back on that dark period in her life, she says: “I wanted to prove that I could make a better life for myself. I wanted to do what I wanted to do, and I did not want anyone to tell me differently.” Like the prodigal, this young woman sought independence. Tragically, for her unscriptural practices she had to be expelled from the Christian congregation.—1 Corinthians 5:11-13.

⁸ It is truly heartbreaking when a fellow believer manifests a desire to live contrary to God’s standards. (Philippians 3:18) When this happens, elders and others with spiritual qualifications strive to readjust the erring one. (Galatians 6:1) Nevertheless, no one is forced to accept the yoke of Christian discipleship. (Matthew 11:28-30; 16:24) When they come of age, even youths must make a personal choice in the matter of worship. Ultimately, each one of us is a free moral agent who will render an account to God for himself. (Romans 14:12) Of course, we will also ‘reap what we sow’—a lesson that the prodigal in Jesus’ parable was soon to learn.—Galatians 6:7, 8.

Despair in a Distant Country

9 “When he had spent everything, a

8. (a) What assistance can be offered to those who desire to live contrary to God’s standards?
(b) Why should one give sobering consideration to one’s choice in the matter of worship?
- 9, 10. (a) What change of circumstance did the prodigal experience, and how did he react to it?
(b) Illustrate how some today who abandon true worship experience a plight similar to the prodigal’s.

severe famine occurred throughout that country, and he started to be in need. He even went and attached himself to one of the citizens of that country, and he sent him into his fields to herd swine. And he used to desire to be filled with the carob pods which the swine were eating, and no one would give him anything.”—Luke 15:14-16.

¹⁰ Although he was destitute, the prodigal did not yet consider returning home. Instead, he met a citizen who gave him a job herding swine. Since the Mosaic Law stipulated that pigs were unclean animals, such employment would likely be unacceptable to a Jew. (Leviticus 11:7, 8) But if the prodigal felt any stirrings of conscience, he had to stifle them. After all, he could not expect his employer, a local citizen, to be bothered with the feelings of a down-and-out foreigner. The plight of the prodigal is similar to the experience of many today who abandon the straight path of pure worship. Often, such ones become involved in activities that they previously would have considered degrading. For example, at the age of 17, one young man rebelled against his Christian upbringing.

“Immorality and abuse of drugs erased years of Bible-based teachings,” he admits. Soon, this young man found himself in prison for armed robbery and murder. Although he later made a spiritual recovery, what a heavy price he had to pay for “the temporary enjoyment of sin”!—Compare Hebrews 11:24-26.

¹¹ The prodigal’s dilemma was compounded by the fact that “no one would give him anything.” Where were his newfound friends? Now that he was penniless, he was as if “an object of hatred” to them. (Proverbs 14:20) Likewise, many today who stray from the faith discover that the allurements and views of this world amount to “empty deception.” (Colossians 2:8) “I suffered much pain and heartache without Jehovah’s guidance,” says one young woman who for a time left God’s organization. “I tried to fit in with the world, but because I was not truly like others, they rejected me. I felt like a lost child who needed a father to guide me.

11. How was the prodigal’s dilemma compounded, and how have some today found the world’s allurements to be an “empty deception”?



That is when I realized that I needed Jehovah. I never wanted to live independent of him again." The prodigal in Jesus' illustration came to a similar realization.

The Prodigal Comes to His Senses

¹² "When he came to his senses, he said, 'How many hired men of my father are abounding with bread, while I am perishing here from famine! I will rise and journey to my father and say to him: "Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Make me as one of your hired men." ' So he rose and went to his father." —Luke 15:17-20.

¹³ The prodigal "came to his senses." For a time, he had been indulging in pleasure-seeking, as if living in a dreamworld. But now he became keenly aware of his true spiritual condition. Yes, even though he had fallen, there was still hope for this young man. Something good could be found in him. (Proverbs 24:16; compare 2 Chronicles 19:2, 3.) What about those who leave God's flock today? Would it be reasonable to conclude that they all are beyond hope, that in every case their rebellious course proves that they have sinned against God's holy spirit? (Matthew 12:31, 32) Not necessarily. A number of them are tormented by their wayward course, and in time many of these come to their senses. "I never, even for one day, forgot about Jehovah," says one sister, reflecting on the time she spent away from God's organization. "I always prayed that somehow, someday, he would accept me back to the truth." —Psalm 119:176.

¹⁴ But what can those who have strayed do about their situation? In Jesus' parable the

12, 13. What factors have helped some today to come to their senses? (See box.)

14. What resolve did the prodigal make, and how did he show humility in doing so?

THEY CAME TO THEIR SENSES

What has helped some who were once expelled from the Christian congregation to come to their senses? The following comments shed light on the matter.

"In my heart I still knew where the truth was. Years of studying the Bible and going to Christian meetings had made a major impact on me. How could I turn my back on Jehovah any longer? He had not left me; I had left him. Finally, I admitted how wrong and stubborn I had been and that Jehovah's Word was right all along—'you reap what you sow.' " —C.W.

"My baby girl began to talk, and that touched my heart since I wanted to teach her things like who Jehovah is and how to pray to him. I could not sleep, and late one night I drove to a park and just cried. I cried, and I prayed to Jehovah for the first time in a long time. All I knew was that I needed Jehovah back in my life, and I hoped he could forgive me." —G.H.

"When the subject of religion would arise, I would tell people that if I were to choose the religion that taught the truth, I'd have to be one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Then I'd say that I used to be one, but I couldn't live up to it, so I left. Realizing this, I often felt guilty and unhappy. I finally admitted, 'I'm miserable. I need to make some drastic changes.' " —C.N.

"Thirty-five years ago my husband and I were disfellowshipped. Then, in 1991, we had the pleasant surprise of being visited by two elders who informed us of the possibility of returning to Jehovah. Six months later, we were overjoyed to be reinstated. My husband and I are 79 and 63 years old respectively." —C.A.

prodigal decided to journey back home and beg for his father's forgiveness. "Make me as one of your hired men," the prodigal resolved to say. A hired servant was a day laborer who could be dismissed on a day's notice. This was even lower than a slave who was, in a sense, like a member of the family. So the prodigal did not have in mind asking that he be restored to his former status as a son. He would be quite willing to accept the lowest position in order to prove his renewed loyalty to his father day by day. However, the prodigal was in for a surprise.

A Heartwarming Reception

¹⁵ "While he was yet a long way off, his father caught sight of him and was moved with pity, and he ran and fell upon his neck and tenderly kissed him. Then the son said to him, 'Father, I have sinned against heaven and against you. I am no longer worthy of being called your son. Make me as one of your hired men.' But the father said to his slaves, 'Quick! bring out a robe, the best one, and clothe him

15-17. (a) How did the father react upon seeing his son? (b) What is signified by the robe, ring, and sandals that the father provided for his son? (c) What is shown by the father's arranging for a feast?

In Review

- How did Jesus' attitude toward mercy contrast with that of the Pharisees?
- Who today resemble the prodigal, and how?
- What circumstances brought the prodigal to his senses?
- How did the father show mercy toward his repentant son?

with it, and put a ring on his hand and sandals on his feet. And bring the fattened young bull, slaughter it and let us eat and enjoy ourselves, because this my son was dead and came to life again; he was lost and was found.' And they started to enjoy themselves."—Luke 15:20-24.

¹⁶ Any loving parent would long for the spiritual recovery of a child. Hence, we can just imagine the father of the prodigal gazing each day down the path in front of his house, anxiously hoping for his son's return. Now he catches sight of his son coming up the path! The lad's appearance was undoubtedly altered. Still, the father recognizes him while he is "yet a long way off." He sees beyond the tattered clothing and the dejected spirit; he sees his son, and he runs to meet him!

¹⁷ When the father reached his son, he fell upon his son's neck and tenderly kissed him. Then he commanded his slaves to provide his son with a robe, a ring, and sandals. This robe was not merely a simple article of clothing, but "the best one"—perhaps a richly embroidered vestment of the sort presented to an honored guest. Since a ring and sandals were not usually seen on slaves, the father was making it clear that his son was being welcomed back as a full-fledged family member. But the father did still more. He ordered a feast to celebrate the return of his son. Clearly, this man was not forgiving his son begrudgingly or simply because the return of his son made it obligatory; he wanted to extend forgiveness. It made him rejoice.

¹⁸ Thus far, what does the parable of the prodigal son teach us about the God whom

18, 19. (a) What does the parable of the prodigal son teach you about Jehovah? (b) As shown in his dealings with Judah and Jerusalem, how does Jehovah "keep in expectation" of a sinner's return?

we are privileged to worship? First, that Jehovah is “merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness and truth.” (Exodus 34:6) Indeed, mercy is a salient quality of God. It is his normal way of reacting toward those in need. Then, Jesus’ parable teaches us that Jehovah is “ready to forgive.” (Psalm 86:5) He is on the lookout, as it were, to observe any change of heart on the part of sinful humans that would provide a basis for him to extend mercy.

—2 Chronicles 12:12; 16:9.

¹⁹ Think, for example, of God’s dealings with Israel. The prophet Isaiah was inspired by Jehovah to describe Judah and Jerusalem as ‘sick from head to foot.’ Yet, he also said: “Jehovah will *keep in expectation* of showing you favor, and therefore he will rise up to show you mercy.” (Isaiah 1:5, 6; 30:18; 55:7; Ezekiel 33:11) Like the father in Jesus’ parable, Jehovah ‘watches the path,’ as it were. He keenly anticipates the return of any who have left his house. Is this not what

we would expect of a loving father?—Psalm 103:13.

²⁰ Each year, Jehovah’s mercy draws many to come to their senses and return to true worship. What joy this brings to their loved ones! Take, for example, the Christian father mentioned at the outset. Happily, his daughter made a spiritual recovery and now serves as a full-time minister. “I’m as happy as a person can be in this old system of things,” he says. “My tears of sorrow have been changed to tears of joy.” Surely, Jehovah rejoices as well!—Proverbs 27:11.

²¹ But there is more to the parable of the prodigal. Jesus continued his story so that he could contrast Jehovah’s mercy with the rigid, judgmental stance common among the scribes and Pharisees. How he did so—and what this means for us—will be discussed in the following article.

20, 21. (a) In what way are many today being drawn by God’s mercy? (b) What will be discussed in the following article?

IMITATE JEHOVAH’S MERCY

“Continue becoming merciful, just as your Father is merciful.”

—LUKE 6:36.

ALTHOUGH created in God’s image, humans often fail to imitate his mercy. (Genesis 1:27) For example, consider the Pharisees. As a group, they could not bring themselves to rejoice when Je-

1. How did the Pharisees show themselves to be merciless?

sus mercifully cured a man’s withered hand on the Sabbath. Instead, they took counsel against Jesus “that they might destroy him.” (Matthew 12:9-14) On another occasion, Jesus healed a man who was blind from birth. Once again, “some of the Pharisees” found no cause for joy in Jesus’ compassion.

Instead, they complained: "This is not a man from God, because he does not observe the Sabbath."—John 9:1-7, 16.

² The coldhearted attitude of the Pharisees constituted a crime against humanity and a sin against God. (John 9:39-41) With good reason, Jesus warned his disciples, "Watch out for the leaven" of this elitist group and other religionists, such as the Sadducees. (Matthew 16:6) Leaven is used in the Bible to represent sin or corruption. So Jesus was saying that the teaching of the "scribes and Pharisees" could corrupt pure worship. How? In that it taught people to view God's Law solely in terms of their arbitrary rules and rituals, while ignoring "the weightier matters," including mercy. (Matthew 23:23) This ritualistic form of religion made worship of God an intolerable burden.

³ In the second part of his parable of the prodigal, Jesus exposed the corrupt thinking of the Jewish religious leaders. In the parable the father, who represents Jehovah, was eager to forgive his repentant son. But the boy's older brother, who typified "the Pharisees and the scribes," had completely different feelings on the matter.—Luke 15:2.

A Brother's Wrath

⁴ "Now his older son was in the field; and as he came and got near the house he heard a music concert and dancing. So he called one of the servants to him and inquired what these things meant. He said to him, 'Your brother has come, and your father slaughtered the fattened young bull, because he got him back in good health.' But he became wrathful and was unwilling to go in."—Luke 15:25-28.

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- 2, 3. What did Jesus mean by the statement, "Watch out for the leaven of the Pharisees"?
4, 5. In what sense was the prodigal's brother "lost"?

⁵ Clearly, the prodigal was not the only one in Jesus' parable who had a problem. "Both the sons here sketched are lost," says one reference work, "the one through the unrighteousness that degrades him, the other through the self-righteousness which blinds him." Note that the prodigal's brother not only refused to rejoice but also "became wrathful." The Greek root for "wrath" suggests, not so much an outburst of anger, but an abiding condition of the mind. Apparently, the prodigal's brother harbored a deep-seated resentment, so he felt it was inappropriate to celebrate the return of someone who should never have left home in the first place.

⁶ The prodigal's brother well represents those who resented the compassion and attention that Jesus accorded sinners. These self-righteous ones were not touched by Jesus' mercy; neither did they reflect the joy in heaven that arises when a sinner is forgiven. Instead, Jesus' mercy provoked their wrath, and they began "thinking wicked things" in their hearts. (Matthew 9:2-4) On one occasion the anger of some Pharisees was so intense that they summoned a man whom Jesus had healed and then "threw him out" of the synagogue—apparently expelling him! (John 9:22, 34) Like the prodigal's brother, who was "unwilling to go in," the Jewish religious leaders balked when they had opportunity to "rejoice with people who rejoice." (Romans 12:15) Jesus further exposed their wicked reasoning as he continued his parable.

Faulty Reasoning

⁷ "Then his father came out and began to entreat him. In reply he said to his

6. Whom does the prodigal's brother represent, and why?
7, 8. (a) In what way did the prodigal's brother miss the meaning of sonship? (b) How was the older son unlike his father?

The older son refused to rejoice in his brother's return

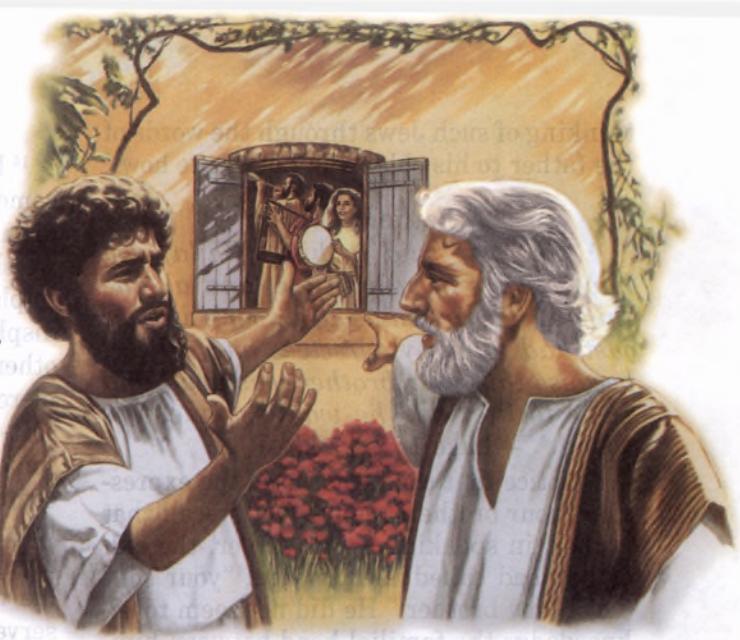
father, 'Here it is so many years I have slaved for you and never once did I transgress your commandment, and yet to me you never once gave a kid for me to enjoy myself with my friends. But as soon as this your son who ate up your means of living with harlots arrived, you slaughtered the fatted young bull for him.'"

—Luke 15:28-30.

⁸ With these words, the prodigal's brother made it clear that he had missed the true meaning of sonship. He served his father much the way an employee serves his employer. As he told his father: "I have slaved for you." True, this eldest son had never left home or transgressed his father's commandment. But was his obedience motivated by love? Did he find real joy in serving his father, or had he instead drifted into smug complacency, believing himself to be a good son simply because he performed his duties "in the field"? If he was truly a devoted son, why did he fail to reflect his father's mind? When given opportunity to show mercy to his brother, why was there no room for compassion in his heart? —Compare Psalm 50:20-22.

⁹ The Jewish religious leaders resembled this older son. They believed that they were loyal to God because they strictly adhered to a code of laws. Granted, obedience is vital. (1 Samuel 15:22) But their overemphasis on works turned worship of God into a bookish routine, a mere shell of devotion with no true spirituality. Their minds were obsessed with traditions. Their hearts were

9. Explain how the Jewish religious leaders resembled the older son.



loveless. Why, they regarded common folk like the dirt beneath their feet, even contemptuously referring to them as "accursed people." (John 7:49) Really, how could God be impressed with the works of such leaders when their hearts were far removed from him?—Matthew 15:7, 8.

¹⁰ Jesus told the Pharisees to "go . . . and learn what this means, 'I want mercy, and not sacrifice.'" (Matthew 9:13; Hosea 6:6) Their priorities were confused, for without mercy all their sacrifices would be worthless. This is indeed a serious matter, for the Bible states that the "merciless" are counted among those viewed by God as "deserving of death." (Romans 1:31, 32) Not surprisingly, therefore, Jesus said that as a class the religious leaders were destined for everlasting destruction. Evidently, their mercilessness contributed largely to their meritizing this judgment. (Matthew 23:33) But perhaps individuals from this class could be reached. In the conclusion of his parable, Jesus strove to readjust the

10. (a) Why were the words, "I want mercy, and not sacrifice" appropriate counsel? (b) How serious a matter is a lack of mercy?

thinking of such Jews through the words of the father to his older son. Let us see how.

A Father's Mercy

¹¹ "Then he said to him, 'Child, you have always been with me, and all the things that are mine are yours; but we just had to enjoy ourselves and rejoice, because this your brother was dead and came to life, and he was lost and was found.'”—Luke 15:31, 32.

¹² Notice that the father used the expression “your brother.” Why? Well, recall that earlier, in speaking to his father, the older boy had called the prodigal “your son”—not “my brother.” He did not seem to acknowledge the familial bond between himself and his sibling. So now the father is, in effect, saying to his older boy: ‘This is not just my son. He is *your brother*, your own flesh and blood. You have every reason to rejoice in his return!’ Jesus’ message should have been clear to the Jewish leaders. The sinners whom they despised were in reality their “brothers.” Indeed, “there is no man righteous in the earth that keeps doing good and does not sin.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20) The prominent Jews had every reason, then, to rejoice when sinners repented.

¹³ After the father’s plea, the parable abruptly ends. It is as if Jesus is inviting his listeners to write their own ending to the story. Whatever the older son’s response was, each listener was faced with the question, ‘Will you share in the joy that is experienced in heaven when a sinner repents?’ Christians today also have opportunity to demonstrate their answer to that question. How?

11, 12. How does the father in Jesus’ parable try to reason with his oldest son, and what might be significant in the father’s use of the phrase “your brother”? 13. The abrupt ending of Jesus’ parable leaves us with what sobering question?

Imitating God’s Mercy Today

¹⁴ Paul admonished the Ephesians: “Become imitators of God, as beloved children.” (Ephesians 5:1) Hence, as Christians we should come to appreciate God’s mercy, implant it deeply into our hearts, and then display this quality in our dealings with others. However, a caution is in order. God’s mercy should not be misinterpreted as a soft-pedaling of sin. For example, there are some who might nonchalantly reason, ‘If I commit a sin, I can always pray to God for forgiveness, and he will be merciful.’ Such an attitude would amount to what the Bible writer Jude called “turning the undeserved kindness of our God into an excuse for loose conduct.” (Jude 4) Although Jehovah is merciful, “by no means will he give exemption from punishment” when dealing with unrepentant wrongdoers.—Exodus 34:7; compare Joshua 24:19; 1 John 5:16.

¹⁵ On the other hand, we need to be just as careful in guarding against the other extreme—a tendency of becoming rigid and judgmental toward those who manifest genuine repentance and godly sadness over their sins. (2 Corinthians 7:11) Since elders are entrusted with the care of Jehovah’s sheep, it is essential that they maintain a balanced view in this regard, especially when handling judicial matters. The Christian congregation must be kept clean, and it is Scripturally proper to “remove the wicked man” by means of disfellowshipping. (1 Corinthians 5:11-13) At the same

14. (a) How can we apply Paul’s counsel found at Ephesians 5:1 when it comes to the matter of mercy? (b) What misunderstanding concerning God’s mercy do we need to guard against?

15. (a) Why do elders in particular need to maintain a balanced view of mercy? (b) While not tolerating willful wrongdoing, what should the elders endeavor to do, and why?

time, it is fine to extend mercy when there is a clear basis for it. So while elders do not tolerate willful wrongdoing, they strive to seek a loving and merciful course, within the bounds of justice. They are ever aware of the Bible principle: "The one that does not practice mercy will have his judgment without mercy. Mercy exults triumphantly over judgment."—James 2:13; Proverbs 19:17; Matthew 5:7.

¹⁶ The parable of the prodigal makes it clear that Jehovah *wishes* erring ones to return to him. Indeed, he holds the invitation out to them until they prove themselves beyond hope. (Ezekiel 33:11; Malachi 3:7; Romans 2:4, 5; 2 Peter 3:9) Like the prodigal's father, Jehovah treats with dignity those who do return, accepting them back as full-fledged members of the family. Are you imitating Jehovah in this regard? When a fellow believer, who for a time was disfellowshipped, is reinstated, how do you respond? We already know that there is "joy in heaven." (Luke 15:7) But is there joy on earth, in your congregation, even in your heart? Or, as with the older son in the parable, is there some resentment, as if no welcome is merited for one who should not have left God's flock in the first place?

¹⁷ To help us examine ourselves in this regard, consider what happened about the year 55 C.E. in Corinth. There, a man who had been expelled from the congregation finally cleaned up his life. What were the brothers to do? Should they view his

16. (a) Using the Bible, show how Jehovah truly desires erring ones to return to him. (b) How can we demonstrate that we too welcome the return of repentant sinners?

17. (a) What situation developed in first-century Corinth, and how did Paul advise those in the congregation to handle the matter? (b) Why was Paul's admonition practical, and how can we apply it today? (See also box at right.)

"CONFIRM YOUR LOVE FOR HIM"

Regarding the expelled wrongdoer who had manifested repentance, Paul told the Corinthian congregation: "I exhort you to confirm your love for him." (2 Corinthians 2:8) The Greek word translated "confirm" is a legal term meaning to "validate." Yes, repentant ones who are reinstated need to sense that they are loved and that they are once again welcome as members of the congregation.

We must remember, however, that most in the congregation are not aware of the particular circumstances that led to a person's expulsion or to his reinstatement. In addition, there may be some who have been personally affected or hurt—perhaps even on a long-term basis—by the wrongdoing of the repentant one. Being sensitive to such matters, therefore, when an announcement of reinstatement is made, we would understandably withhold expressions of welcome until such can be made on a personal basis.

How faith-strengthening it is for those who have been reinstated to know that they are welcomed back as members of the Christian congregation! We can encourage such repentant ones by conversing with them and enjoying their fellowship at the Kingdom Hall, in the ministry, and on other appropriate occasions. By thus confirming, or validating, our love for these dear ones, we do not in any way minimize the seriousness of the sins that they committed. Rather, along with the heavenly hosts, we rejoice in the fact that they have rejected the sinful course and have returned to Jehovah.—Luke 15:7.

repentance with skepticism and continue shunning him? On the contrary, Paul urged the Corinthians: "You should kindly forgive and comfort him, that somehow such a man may not be swallowed up by his being overly sad. Therefore I exhort you to confirm your love for him." (2 Corinthians 2:7, 8) Often, repentant wrongdoers are particularly susceptible to feelings of disgrace and despair. Hence, these ones need to be reassured that they are loved by their fellow believers and by Jehovah. (Jeremiah 31:3; Romans 1:12) This is vital. Why?

¹⁸ In exhorting the Corinthians to practice forgiveness, Paul gave as one of the reasons that "we may not be overreached by Satan, for we are not ignorant of his designs." (2 Corinthians 2:11) What did he mean? Well, earlier Paul had to reprove the Corinthian congregation for being too lenient. They had permitted this same man to carry on his sin with impunity. In doing so, the congregation—in particular its

18, 19. (a) How did the Corinthians earlier show themselves to be too lenient? (b) How could a merciless attitude have resulted in the Corinthians' being "overreached by Satan"?

In Review

- In what way did the prodigal's brother resemble the Jewish religious leaders?
- In what way did the prodigal's brother miss the true meaning of sonship?
- In reflecting upon God's mercy, what two extremes do we need to avoid?
- How can we imitate God's mercy today?

elders—played into Satan's hands, for he would have loved to bring the congregation into a condition of disrepute.—1 Corinthians 5:1-5.

¹⁹ If they now swung to the other extreme and refused to forgive the repentant one, Satan would be overreaching them in another direction. How? In that he could take advantage of their being harsh and merciless. If the repentant sinner became "swallowed up by his being overly sad"—or as *Today's English Version* renders it, "so sad as to give up completely"—what a heavy responsibility the elders would bear before Jehovah! (Compare Ezekiel 34:6; James 3:1) With good reason, after cautioning his followers against stumbling "one of these little ones," Jesus said: "Pay attention to yourselves. If your brother commits a sin give him a rebuke, and if he repents forgive him."*—Luke 17:1-4.

²⁰ The thousands who return to pure worship each year are grateful for the mercy that Jehovah has extended to them. "I do not recall a time in my life that I have ever been so happy about anything," says one Christian sister of her reinstatement. Of course, her joy is echoed among the angels. May we too join in the "joy in heaven" that takes place when a sinner repents. (Luke 15:7) In doing so, we will be imitating Jehovah's mercy.

* Although it seems that the wrongdoer in Corinth was reinstated within a relatively short period of time, this is not to be used as a standard for all disfellowships. Each case is different. Some wrongdoers begin to manifest genuine repentance almost immediately after being expelled. With others, it is quite some time before such an attitude is evident. In all cases, however, those who are reinstated must first show evidence of godly sadness and, where possible, must manifest works befitting repentance.—Acts 26:20; 2 Corinthians 7:11.

20. In what way is there joy both in heaven and on earth when a sinner repents?

Local Cultures and Christian Principles ARE THEY COMPATIBLE?

STEPHEN, a Witness from Northern Europe, was assigned as a missionary to an African country. While strolling through town with a local brother, he was startled when the brother took hold of his hand.

The thought of walking down a busy street holding hands with another man was shocking to Stephen. In his culture such a custom has homosexual connotations. (Romans 1:27) Nevertheless, to the African brother, holding hands was purely a gesture of friendship. The rejection of the hand would signify a rejection of the friendship.

Why should clashes of culture concern us? First of all because Jehovah's people are keen to fulfill their divine commission to "make disciples of people of all the nations." (Matthew 28:19) To accomplish this task, some have moved to serve where the need for ministers is greater. To succeed in their new environment, they must understand and adapt to the distinct cultures they encounter. Then they will be able to work in harmony with their fellow brothers and sisters, while also being more effective in the public ministry.

Furthermore, in this turbulent world, many people have fled from their troubled



homelands for political or economic reasons and have settled in other countries. So we could well find that while preaching to these new neighbors, we are confronted with new customs. (Matthew 22:39) Our initial exposure to different ways may result in a sense of confusion about new customs.

Areas Clearly Defined

Culture is woven into the fabric of human society.

What a fruitless exercise it would be, therefore, to become "righteous overmuch" and investigate every small custom to decide whether it is compatible with Bible principles!—Ecclesiastes 7:16.

On the other hand, there is a need to identify local customs that clearly violate divine principles. Generally, though, that is not difficult to do, since God's Word is available "for setting things straight." (2 Timothy 3:16) For example, having many wives is customary in some lands, but for true Christians the Scriptural standard is for a man to have just one living wife.—Genesis 2:24; 1 Timothy 3:2.

Likewise, certain funeral customs designed to keep away evil spirits, or based on a belief in an immortal soul, would be unacceptable for a true Christian. Some people offer incense or prayers to the departed in



Christian greetings can be expressed properly in many ways

Who of us likes to be kept waiting? In some lands this rarely happens because punctuality is considered important. The Bible tells us that Jehovah is a God of order. (1 Corinthians 14:33) Consequently, he has set a “day and hour” to end wickedness, and he assures us that this event “will not be late.” (Matthew 24:36; Habakkuk 2:3) Cultures that promote reasonable punctuality help us to be orderly and to show proper respect for other people and their time, which is certainly in line with Scriptural principles.—1 Corinthians 14:40; Philippians 2:4.

What About Innocuous Customs?

While some customs are clearly compatible with the Christian way of living, others are not. But what about those customs that cannot be defined as good or bad? Many customs are innocuous, or harmless, and our attitude toward them can demonstrate our spiritual balance.

For example, there are many forms of greetings—a handshake, a bow, a kiss, or even an embrace. Likewise, there is a huge variety of customs governing table manners. In some lands people eat from a communal plate or dish. Burping is an acceptable—even desirable—expression of appreciation in certain countries, whereas in others it is unacceptable and would be classed as the height of bad manners.

Rather than deciding which of these neutral customs you personally like or dislike, concentrate on adopting the right attitude toward them. The timeless counsel from the

order to repel wicked spirits. Others have wakes or even a second burial with the objective of helping the deceased to prepare for life ‘in the next world.’ The Bible teaches, however, that when a person dies, he is “conscious of nothing at all,” and thus he cannot do good or harm to anyone.—Ecclesiastes 9:5; Psalm 146:4.

Of course, there are many customs that are compatible with God’s Word. How refreshing when we come into contact with cultures where the spirit of hospitality still thrives, where custom demands that even a stranger be given a warm greeting and that, when necessary, the home be opened up to him! When you experience such treatment firsthand, are you not moved to follow this example? If you are, it will certainly improve your Christian personality.—Hebrews 13:1, 2.

Bible recommends that we do ‘nothing out of contentiousness or out of egotism, but with lowliness of mind, we consider that others are superior to us.’ (Philippians 2:3) Similarly, Eleanor Boykin, in her book *This Way, Please—A Book of Manners*, says: “A kind heart is the first thing you need.”

This humble approach will prevent us from disparaging the customs of others. We will feel motivated to reach out and learn how other people live, share their customs and taste their foods rather than hold back or view with suspicion everything that seems different. By keeping an open mind and being willing to try new ways, we pay a compliment to our host or our foreign neighbors. We also benefit ourselves as we “widens out” our hearts and our horizons.—2 Corinthians 6:13.

If the Custom Hinders Spiritual Progress

What if we encounter customs that are not unscriptural in themselves, yet they are not conducive to spiritual progress? In some lands, for example, people may be very inclined to procrastinate. This easygoing approach to life can reduce stress, but it will likely make it more difficult for us to accomplish our ministry ‘fully.’—2 Timothy 4:5.

How can we encourage others to avoid putting important things off until “tomorrow”? Remember that “a kind heart is the first thing you need.” Motivated by love, we can set the example and then kindly explain the benefits of not leaving until tomorrow what should be done today. (Ecclesiastes 11:4) At the same time, we must be careful not to sacrifice mutual trust and confidence in the interest of productivity. If our suggestions are not immediately accepted by others, we should not lord it over them or take out our frustration on them. Love must always take precedence over efficiency.—1 Peter 4:8; 5:3.

Taking Into Account Local Taste

We need to be sure that any suggestion we make is a valid one and not just an effort to impose our own personal tastes. Styles of clothing, for example, vary greatly. In many regions it is proper for a man preaching the good news to wear a necktie, but in some tropical countries, it may be viewed as excessively formal. Taking into account local taste as to what is proper dress for a professional person who deals with the public will often be a helpful guide. “Soundness of mind” is vital when we deal with the sensitive issue of clothing.—1 Timothy 2:9, 10.

What if a custom does not please us? Should it automatically be rejected? Not necessarily. The custom of males holding hands, mentioned earlier, was perfectly acceptable in that particular African community. When the missionary noticed that other men were walking around holding hands, he felt more at ease.

The apostle Paul, during his extensive missionary journeys, visited congregations whose members came from diverse backgrounds. Doubtless, clashes of culture were frequent. Thus, Paul adapted to whatever customs he could while firmly adhering to Bible principles. “I have become all things to people of all sorts,” he said, “that I might by all means save some.”—1 Corinthians 9:22, 23; Acts 16:3.

A few pertinent questions may help us decide how we should react to new customs. By our adopting a certain custom—or refusing to do so—what impression are we giving observers? Will they be attracted to the Kingdom message because they can see that we are trying to integrate into their culture? On the other hand, if we do adopt a local custom, could ‘our ministry be found fault with?’—2 Corinthians 6:3.

If we desire to become "all things to people of all sorts," we may have to alter some deeply ingrained views as to what is proper and what is not. Often the "right" and the "wrong" way to do something depends merely on where we are living. Thus, in one country hand-holding among men is a demonstration of friendship, while in many others it would surely detract from the Kingdom message.

There are other customs, however, that are acceptable in various regions and that may even be proper for Christians; yet we must exercise caution.

Beware of Crossing the Line!

Jesus Christ said that although his disciples could not be taken out of the world, they had to remain "no part of the world." (John 17:15, 16) Sometimes, though, it is no easy task to identify the line between what is an integral part of Satan's world and what is merely culture. Music and dancing, for example, permeate almost every culture, although in some lands they assume greater importance.

We may easily make a judgment—based more on our background than on sound Scriptural reasons. Alex, a German brother, received an assignment to Spain. In his former environment, dancing was not very

popular, but in Spain it is part of the culture. When he first saw a brother and a sister performing a lively local dance, he was confused. Was this dancing wrong or perhaps worldly? Would he be lowering his standards if he went along with this custom? Alex learned that although the music and the dancing were different, there was no reason to assume that his Spanish brothers and sisters were lowering Christian standards. His confusion was due to a difference in cultures.

However, Emilio, a brother who enjoys traditional Spanish dancing, recognizes that there is a danger. "I notice that many forms of dancing require the couple to have very close contact," he explains. "As a single person, I realize that this can affect the feelings of at least one of the partners. Sometimes, dancing can be used as an excuse to show affection for someone you feel attracted to. Making sure that the music is wholesome and that physical contact is kept to a minimum can serve as a protection. Nevertheless, I must admit that when a group of young single brothers and sisters go out dancing together, it is very difficult to maintain a theocratic atmosphere."

Certainly, we would not want to use our culture as an excuse for indulging in worldly behavior. Singing and dancing had a place in Israelite culture, and when the Israelites were liberated from Egypt at the Red Sea, their celebration included both song and dance. (Exodus 15:1, 20) However, their particular form of music and dancing differed from that of the pagan world around them.

Sad to say, while waiting for Moses to return from Mount Sinai, the Israelites got impatient, made a golden calf, and after eating and drinking "got up to have a good time." (Exodus 32:1-6) When Moses and Joshua heard the sound of their singing, it

In Our Next Issue

Who Really Believe the Bible?

A Jerusalem True to Its Name

When Hearts of Stone
Turn Responsive



A balanced view of diverse cultures can lead to a rich, colorful life

immediately disturbed them. (Exodus 32:17, 18) The Israelites had crossed that "line," and their form of singing and dancing now reflected the pagan world around them.

Similarly today, music and dancing may be generally acceptable in our locality and may not offend the conscience of others. But if the lights are turned low, flashing lights are added, or music with a different rhythm is played, what was formerly acceptable may now reflect the spirit of the world. "It is just our culture," we could argue. Aaron used a similar excuse when he acquiesced to pagan forms of entertainment and worship, erroneously describing them as "a festival to Jehovah." This lame excuse was invalid. Why, their conduct was even viewed as "a disgrace among their opposers."—Exodus 32:5, 25.

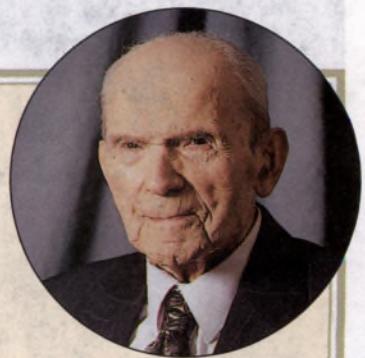
Culture Has Its Place

Exotic customs may at first shock us, but not all of them are necessarily unacceptable. With our "perceptive powers trained," we can determine which customs are compatible with Christian principles and which are not. (Hebrews 5:14) When we manifest a kind heart full of love for our fellowman, we will react appropriately when faced with innocuous customs.

As we preach the Kingdom good news to people in our local area or further afield, a balanced approach to the kaleidoscope of cultures will enable us to become 'all things to all men.' And doubtless we will find that as we welcome the variety of cultures, it will contribute to our having a rich, colorful, and fascinating life.

I FOUND SOMETHING BETTER THAN GOLD

AS TOLD BY CHARLES MYLTON



One day Father said: "Let us send Charlie to America where money grows on trees. He could get some and send it back to us!"

PEOPLE, in effect, thought the streets in America were paved with gold. Life for them was extremely hard in eastern Europe in those days. My parents had a small farm and raised a few cows and some chickens. We had no electricity or indoor plumbing. But, then, neither did anybody else nearby.

I was born in Hoszowczyk on January 1, 1893, nearly 106 years ago. Our village was in Galicia, a province then a part of the Austro-Hungarian empire. Now Hoszowczyk is found in eastern Poland not far from Slovakia and Ukraine. The winters there were hard and the snows deep. When I was about seven, I would walk a quarter of a mile to the creek and with an ax chop a hole in the ice to get water. I would carry it home and Mother would use it for cooking and cleaning. She washed clothes at the creek, using the larger pieces of ice as a scrub board.

In Hoszowczyk there were no schools, but I did learn to speak Polish, Russian, Slovak, and Ukrainian. We were raised Greek Orthodox, and I served as an altar boy. But even at an early age, I became upset with the priests who said that we should not eat meat on Friday but who themselves did.

Some of our friends had returned from jobs in the United States with money to fix

up their homes and to buy farm equipment. This is what prompted Father to talk about sending me to America with some neighbors who were planning another trip there. That was in 1907 when I was 14.

Lost in America

Soon I was on a ship, and in two weeks we had crossed the Atlantic. At the time, you needed 20 dollars, otherwise they would send you back to your homeland. I had a 20-dollar silver piece, and thus I became one of the millions who passed through Ellis Island, New York, doorway to America. Money, of course, did not grow on the trees, and the streets were not paved with gold. In fact, many of them were not paved at all!

We caught a train to Johnstown, Pennsylvania. The men with me had been there before and knew a boarding house where I could stay. The idea was for me to find my older sister who lived in Jerome, Pennsylvania, which I later learned was only about 15 miles away. But I would say Yarome, rather than Jerome, because the "J" is pronounced like a "Y" in my native tongue. No one had heard of Yarome, so there I was in a strange country, speaking hardly any English and with not much money.

I spent each morning looking for a job.

At the employment office, only two or three would get hired out of the scores lined up outside. So each day I returned to the boarding house to study English with the aid of some self-help books. Sometimes I found odd jobs, but months went by, and my money was almost gone.

United With Siblings

One day I passed by a hotel with a bar near the train station. The food sure smelled good! The sandwiches, wieners, and other items at the bar were free if one bought the beer, which was five cents for a large glass. Although I was underage, the bartender felt sorry for me and sold me the beer.

While I was eating, some men came in saying: "Hurry and drink up! The train is coming for Jerome."

"You mean Yarome?" I asked.

"No, Jerome," the men said. It was then that I learned where my sister lived. In fact, at the bar, I met a man who lived only three doors from her! So I bought a train ticket and finally found my sister.

My sister and her husband ran a boarding

house for coal miners, and I lived with them. They got me a job watching a pump that kept the water out of the mine. Anytime it stopped working, I was to call a mechanic. The job paid 15 cents a day. Then I worked on the railroad, in a brickyard, and even as an insurance agent. Later I moved to Pittsburgh where my brother Steve was living. There, we worked in the steel mills. I never did make enough money to send any home.

A Family and a Funeral

While walking to work one day, I noticed a young housemaid standing in front of the home where she worked. I thought to myself, 'My, she sure is pretty.' Three weeks later, in 1917, Helen and I were married. During the next ten years, we had six children, one of whom died while still an infant.

In 1918 the Pittsburgh Railways hired me as a streetcar driver. Near the streetcar barn was a café where one could get a cup of coffee. Inside, the two Greek men who owned the place did not seem to care if you ordered anything, as long as they could preach to you from the Bible. I would say: "Do you mean to tell me that the whole world is wrong and you two are the only ones who are right?"

"Well, look it up in the Bible!" they would say. But at the time, they failed to convince me.

Sadly, in 1928, my dear Helen fell sick. In order for the children to receive better care, I took them to live with my sister and her husband in Jerome. By this time they had bought a farm. I visited the children often and provided money every month to pay for their food. I also sent them clothes. Sadly, Helen's condition worsened, and she died on August 27, 1930.

I felt alone and devastated. When I went to the priest to make funeral arrangements, he said: "You do not belong to this church anymore. You have not paid dues for over a year."



When I drove a streetcar

I explained that my wife had been sick for a long time and that I gave any extra money to my children so that they could contribute to the church in Jerome. Still, before the priest agreed to handle the funeral, I had to borrow 50 dollars to pay my back dues. The priest also wanted an extra 15 dollars to say Mass at my sister-in-law's place where friends and family had planned to gather to pay last respects to Helen. I could not come up with the 15 dollars, but the priest agreed to hold the Mass if I gave him the money on payday.

When payday came I had to use the money to buy the children shoes and clothes for school. Well, about two weeks later, the priest boarded my streetcar. "You still owe me that 15 dollars," he said. Then, when he got off at his stop, he threatened, "I'm going to your boss and have the money taken out of your pay."

At the end of the workday, I went to my supervisor and told him what had happened. Even though he was a Catholic, he said, "If that priest comes in here, I'll give him a piece of my mind!" That started me thinking, 'The priests only want our money, but they never teach us anything about the Bible.'

Learning the Truth

The next time I was in the café run by the two Greek men, we discussed my experience with the priest. As a result, I began studying with the Bible Students, as Jehovah's Witnesses were then called. I would stay up all night reading the Bible and Bible literature. I learned that Helen was not suffering in purgatory, as the priest had said, but she



*At the nursing home
where I now live*

was sleeping in death. (Job 14:13, 14; John 11:11-14) Indeed, I had found something much better than gold—it was the truth!

A couple of weeks later, at my first meeting with the Bible Students at the Garden Theatre in Pittsburgh, I raised my hand and said, "I have learned more about the Bible tonight than I did in all my years in the church." Later, when they asked who wanted to share in the preaching work the following day, my hand went up again.

Then, on October 4, 1931, I symbolized my dedication to Jehovah by water baptism. In the meantime I was able to rent a house and bring the children back to live with me, hiring a housekeeper to help care for them. Despite my family responsibilities, from January 1932 to June 1933, I shared in a form of special service called auxiliary, in which I spent 50 to 60 hours each month talking to others about the Bible.

About this time I began noticing a certain pretty young woman who always seemed to ride my streetcar on her way to and from work. We would catch each other's eye in my rear-view mirror. That was how Mary and I met. We courted and were married in August 1936.

By 1949 my seniority on the job enabled me to pick a shift that allowed me to pioneer, as the full-time ministry is called. My youngest daughter, Jean, had started pioneering in 1945, and we pioneered together. Later, Jean met Sam Friend, who was serving at Bethel, the world headquarters of Jehovah's Witnesses in Brooklyn, New York.*

* A life story about Sam Friend appears in the August 1, 1986, issue of *The Watchtower*, pages 22-6.

They were married in 1952. I continued pioneering in Pittsburgh and conducted many Bible studies, at one time with 14 different families each week. In 1958, I retired from my streetcar job. After that, pioneering was easy, since I no longer had to work secularly eight hours a day.

In 1983, Mary took ill. I tried to take care of her as she had taken care of me so well for nearly 50 years. Eventually, on September 14, 1986, she passed away.

Finding My Birthplace

In 1989, Jean and Sam took me with them to conventions in Poland. We also visited the area where I grew up. When the Russians took over that part of the world, they changed the names of the towns and deported people to other lands. One of my brothers was deported to Istanbul and a sister to Russia. And the name of my village was unfamiliar to those we asked.

Then some distant mountains looked familiar to me. As we got closer, other landmarks became recognizable—a hill, a fork in the road, a church, a bridge over a river. Suddenly, to our surprise, we saw a sign that said “Hoszowczyk”! A short time before, the Communists had lost influence, and the original names of villages had been restored.

Our house no longer existed, but there was the oven that had been used for outside cooking, partially buried in the ground. Then I pointed to a large tree and said: “See that tree. I planted it before leaving for America. Look how big it has grown!” Afterward, we visited graveyards, looking for names of family members, but we did not find any.



Hoszowczyk

The road sign we found in 1989

Putting the Truth First

When Jean’s husband died in 1993, she asked me if I wanted her to leave Bethel to take care of me. I told her that that would be about the worst thing she could do, and my feelings are still the same. I lived by myself until I was 102, but then it became necessary to move me into a nursing home. I am still an elder with the Bellevue Congregation in Pittsburgh, and the brothers come and take me to meetings at the Kingdom Hall on Sundays. Although my preaching activity now is quite limited, I remain on the infirm pioneer list.

Over the years, I have enjoyed the special schools for training overseers arranged by the Watch Tower Society. Last December, I attended some of the sessions of the Kingdom Ministry School for congregation elders. And this past April 11, Jean took me to the Memorial of Christ’s death, a celebration that I have treasured having a part in every year since 1931.

Some of those I have studied the Bible with now serve as elders, others are missionaries in South America, and some are grandparents, serving God with their children. Three of my own children—Mary Jane, John, and Jean—as well as many of their children and grandchildren are faithfully serving Jehovah God. My prayer is that someday my other daughter and the rest of my grandchildren and great-grandchildren may do likewise.

Now at 105 years of age, I still encourage everyone to study the Bible and to talk to others about what they have learned. Yes, I am convinced that if you stay close to Jehovah, you will never be disappointed. Then you too can enjoy something better than gold that perishes—the truth that allows us to have a precious relationship with our Life-Giver, Jehovah God.

Keep Making Spiritual Progress!

THE DAY OF OUR BAPTISM IS A DAY WE SHOULD ALWAYS CHERISH AND REMEMBER. AFTER ALL, IT IS THE DAY ON WHICH WE GO ON PUBLIC RECORD AS HAVING MADE A DEDICATION TO SERVE GOD.

FOR many individuals it takes monumental effort to reach this point—quitting long-standing bad habits, ridding oneself of unwholesome associates, changing deeply ingrained patterns of thinking and behavior.

Even so, while baptism is a happy and significant event in a Christian's life, it is still only a beginning. The apostle Paul told baptized Christians in Judea: "Now that we have left the primary doctrine about the Christ, let us press on to maturity." (Hebrews 6:1) Yes, all Christians need to "attain to the oneness in the faith and in the accurate knowledge of the Son of God, to a full-grown man, to the measure of stature that belongs to the fullness of the Christ." (Ephesians 4:13) Only by progressing to the point of maturity can we truly be "stabilized in the faith." —Colossians 2:7.

Over the past few years, hundreds of thousands of newly dedicated worshipers have come into the Christian congregation. Perhaps you are one of them. Like your first-century brothers, you do not want to remain in spiritual infancy. You want to grow, to advance! But how? And what are some ways in which you can make such progress?

Progressing by Means of Personal Study

Paul told Christians in Philippi: "This is what I continue praying, that your love may

abound yet more and more with accurate knowledge and full discernment." (Philippians 1:9) Growing in "accurate knowledge" is crucial to your spiritual progress. 'Taking in knowledge of Jehovah God and Jesus Christ' is an ongoing process, not something that ceases after baptism.—John 17:3.

One Christian sister, whom we will call Alexandra, came to realize this ten years after she was baptized at the age of 16. She was brought up in the truth and had always been regular in attending Christian meetings and sharing in the preaching work. She writes: "In the past few months, I realized that something was terribly wrong. I decided to take a hard, honest look at myself, what I feel for the truth, and why I am still in the truth." What did she find? She continues: "I found that the reasons for my being in the truth were disturbing to me. I remembered that as I was growing up, meetings and field service were emphasized. It was as though habits of personal study and prayer would somehow fall into place. But as I analyzed my situation, I realized that this did not happen."

The apostle Paul exhorts: "To what extent we have made progress, let us go on walking orderly in this same routine." (Philippians 3:16) A routine can set the course of forward movement. Before your baptism, you no doubt had a weekly routine of Bible

study with a well-qualified teacher. As you grew in appreciation, you included in this routine preparation for each week's lesson, looking up cited texts in the Bible, and so on. Now that you are baptized, have you continued to 'walk in that same routine'?

If not, you may need to reexamine your priorities, 'making sure of the more important things.' (Philippians 1:10) In our busy lives, it takes self-control to set aside time for personal Bible reading and study. But the benefits make it worth such effort. Consider again the experience of Alexandra. "I must say that I have been existing in the truth for the past 20 or so years by just going to meetings and engaging in the field ministry," she admits. However, she continues, "I have come to the conclusion that although these things are important, they alone cannot sustain me when things start getting difficult. All of this has come to the fore because my personal study habits are practically nonexistent, and my prayers are erratic and superficial. I realize now that I have to readjust my thinking and begin a meaningful study program so that I can really get to know Jehovah and come to love him and appreciate what his Son has given us."

If you need help in establishing a healthy routine of personal study, the elders and other mature Christians in your congregation will be happy to assist you. Additionally, articles appearing in the May 1, 1995; August 15, 1993; and May 15, 1986, issues of *The Watchtower* have a number of helpful suggestions.

The Need to Draw Close to God

Another area in which you should strive to progress is in your relationship with God. In some cases there may even be an acute need in this regard. Consider Anthony, who was baptized at a young age. "I was the



***It takes discipline
to find time for personal study***

first child in our family to be baptized," he relates. "After my baptism, I received a warm hug from my mother. I had never seen her happier. There was so much joy, and I felt so strong." There was, however, another side to the picture. "For quite some time, there had not been any young people baptized in our congregation," Anthony continues. "So I felt very proud of myself. I also took pride in my comments and talks at the meetings. Gaining people's praise and approval became more important to me than bringing praise to Jehovah. I really did not have a close relationship with him."

Like Anthony, some may have made a dedication more out of a desire to please others than out of a desire to please Jehovah. Even so, God expects such ones to live up to their promise to serve him. (Compare Ecclesiastes 5:4.) Without a personal attachment to God, though, it is often difficult for them to do so. Anthony recalls: "The intense joy that I had at my baptism was short-lived. It was not a

full year after my baptism that I fell into serious wrongdoing and had to be reproved by the elders in the congregation. Repeated misconduct led to my being disfellowshipped from the congregation. Six years after my dedication to Jehovah, I was arrested and jailed for murder."

Developing an Intimate Relationship With Jehovah

Whatever your own situation, all Christians can respond to the Bible's invitation: "Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you." (James 4:8) No doubt you cultivated a measure of closeness to God when you first studied the Bible. You learned that God is not the abstract deity worshiped in Christendom, but a person with a name, Jehovah. You also learned that he has appealing qualities, that he is "a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abundant in loving-kindness."—Exodus 34:6.

To live up to your dedication to serve God, however, you must draw even closer to him! How? The psalmist prayed: "Make me know your own ways, O Jehovah; teach me your own paths." (Psalm 25:4) Personal study of the Bible and of the Society's publications can help you become better acquainted with Jehovah. Regularly engaging in heartfelt prayer is also important. "Before him pour out your heart," urges the psalmist. (Psalm 62:8) As you experience your prayers being answered, you will sense God's personal interest in you. This will help you to feel closer to him.

Trials and problems present yet another opportunity to draw close to God. You may face challenges and tests of faith, such as sickness, pressures at school and in the workplace, or economic hardship. It may even be that the normal theocratic routine of sharing in the ministry, attending the meetings, or studying the Bible with your

children is difficult for you. Do not face such problems alone! Implore God for help, asking for his guidance and direction. (Proverbs 3:5, 6) Beg him for his holy spirit! (Luke 11:13) As you experience God's loving assistance, you will be drawn even closer to him. As the psalmist David put it, "taste and see that Jehovah is good . . . Happy is the able-bodied man that takes refuge in him."—Psalm 34:8.

What about Anthony? "I began to think of the time when I had so many spiritual goals centered around doing Jehovah's will," he recalls. "This was painful. But through all the pain and disappointment, I remembered Jehovah's love. It took a while before I was able to pray to Jehovah, but this I did, and I poured out my heart to him, asking for his forgiveness. I also began reading the Bible and was surprised how much I had forgotten and how little I had really known about Jehovah." Though Anthony has yet to complete the prison term for his crime, he receives help from local Witnesses and is on his way to spiritual recovery. Gratefully, Anthony says: "Thanks to Jehovah and his organization, I have been able to strip off the old personality, and I strive to put on the new each day. My relationship with Jehovah is of utmost importance to me now."

Spiritual Progress in Your Ministry

Jesus Christ commanded his followers to be preachers of the "good news of the kingdom." (Matthew 24:14) As a relatively new publisher of the good news, your experience in the ministry may be limited. How, then, can you make progress so as to 'accomplish your ministry fully'?—2 Timothy 4:5.

One way is to develop a positive attitude. Learn to view the preaching work as a "treasure," a privilege. (2 Corinthians 4:7) It is an opportunity to demonstrate our love, loyalty, and integrity to Jehovah. It also

allows us to demonstrate concern for our neighbor. Unselfishly giving of ourselves in this regard can be a source of genuine happiness.—Acts 20:35.

Jesus himself had a positive view of the preaching work. Sharing Bible truths with others was like “food” to him. (John 4:34) His motivation for helping others may therefore best be summed up in his words, “I want to.” (Matthew 8:3) Jesus had compassion for people, especially those who had been “skinned and thrown about” by Satan’s world. (Matthew 9:35, 36) Do you likewise “want to” help those who are in darkness spiritually and who need enlightenment from God’s Word? Then you will feel *impelled* to respond to Jesus’ command: “Go therefore and make disciples of people of all the nations.” (Matthew 28:19) Indeed, you will be moved to have as full a share in this work as your health and circumstances permit.

Another key to progress is having a regular share in the ministry—every week if possible. Doing so can help diminish the apprehension and fear that might hinder one who preaches only occasionally. Regularly participating in the field service will benefit you in other ways too. It will enhance your appreciation for the truth, nourish your love for Jehovah and neighbor, and help you to keep focused on the Kingdom hope.

What, though, if your current situation greatly limits your participation in the preaching work? If adjustments are simply not possible, then take comfort in knowing that God is well-pleased by whatever you are able to do, as long as you are whole-souled in your service. (Matthew 13:23) Perhaps you can progress in other ways, such as by sharpening your preaching skills. In the congregation, the Theocratic Ministry School and Service Meeting pro-

Having a positive attitude can help us to find joy in the ministry

vide much fine training in this regard. Naturally, the more competent we are in the ministry, the more we will enjoy it and see results.

It is clear, then, that spiritual progress must not stop the day one gets baptized. The apostle Paul wrote regarding his hope of attaining immortal life in the heavens: “Brothers, I do not yet consider myself as having laid hold on it; but there is one thing about it: Forgetting the things behind and stretching forward to the things ahead, I am pursuing down toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God by means of Christ Jesus. Let us, then, as many of us as are mature, be of this mental attitude; and if you are mentally inclined otherwise in any respect, God will reveal the above attitude to you.”—Philippians 3:13-15.

Yes, all Christians, whether their hope is immortality in the heavens or everlasting life in Paradise on earth, must ‘stretch forward’—straining, as it were, to attain the goal of life! Your baptism was a fine start, but it is only a beginning. Continue striving to make spiritual progress. Through meetings and personal study, “become full-grown in powers of understanding.” (1 Corinthians 14:20) Be “able to grasp mentally . . . the breadth and length and height and depth” of the truth. (Ephesians 3:18) The progress you make will help you not only to maintain joy and happiness now but also to obtain a secure place in God’s new world, where under the rule of his heavenly Kingdom, you will be able to progress eternally!





IF YOU were traveling on an unfamiliar road or pathway, would you view signposts as a hindrance? Not likely! Surely you would view them as an aid to help you from straying off the route leading to your destination.

What, though, of traveling life's road? Can it be successfully negotiated without signposts? An ancient prophet of God acknowledged mankind's limitations in this regard. He said: "I know, O LORD, that man's ways are not of his own choosing; nor is it for a man to determine his course in life."

—*Jeremiah 10:23, The New English Bible.*

Where, then, can the needed direction be found? The reliable source of such guidance

SIGNPOSTS ON LIFE'S ROAD

is man's Creator, and the figurative signposts are to be found in the Bible. Jehovah, by means of his Word, says: "Your own ears will hear a word behind you saying: 'This is the way. Walk in it, you people,' in case you people should go to the right or in case you should go to the left."—Isaiah 30:21.

Yes, God's Word gives reliable guidance in every aspect of our life. (Isaiah 48:17; 2 Timothy 3:16, 17) Sadly, however, the majority of mankind travel life's path independent of divine direction. (Matthew 7:13) Still, the signposts are immovably set in place! Will you pay heed to them as you walk life's road?

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