



IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

5 THINGS  
YOU CAN  
DO TODAY

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## COVER SUBJECT

# WAYS TO IMPROVE YOUR HEALTH

WHO wants to be sick? At the very least, an illness is an inconvenience and an expense. You not only feel bad, but when you are sick, you may not be able to go to work or school, earn any money, or look after your family. You may even need someone to look after you, and you may have to pay for expensive medicines and treatment.

Well has it been said that “Prevention is better than cure.” Some illnesses cannot be avoided. Still, there is much you can do to slow down or even prevent the onset of illness. Consider five things that you can do today to get on the road to better health.

Vol. 96, No. 6 / Monthly / ENGLISH  
Printing Each Issue: 51,788,000 in 103 Languages

This publication is not for sale. It is provided as part of a worldwide Bible educational work supported by voluntary donations. Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

*Awake!* (ISSN 0005-237X) is published monthly by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; L. Weaver, Jr., President; G. F. Simonis, Secretary-Treasurer; 25 Columbia Heights, Brooklyn, NY 11201-2483, and by Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Canada, PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4. Periodicals Postage Paid at Brooklyn, N.Y., and at additional mailing offices.

**POSTMASTER:** Send address changes to *Awake!* 1000 Red Mills Road, **Wallkill, NY 12589-3299**.

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# 1

## PRACTICE GOOD HYGIENE

ACCORDING to the Mayo Clinic, “one of the best ways to avoid getting sick and spreading illness” is to wash your hands. One of the easiest ways to catch a cold or influenza is to rub your nose or your eyes when your hands have been contaminated by germs. Your best defense against such contamination is to wash your hands regularly. Good hygiene can also prevent the spread of more serious conditions, such as pneumonia and diarrheal diseases, which every year cause the death of over two million children under the age of five. Even the spread of deadly Ebola can be minimized by the simple habit of washing hands.

There are certain times when hand washing is particularly important to protect your own health and that of others. You should wash your hands:

- After using the toilet.
- After changing diapers or helping a child to use the toilet.
- Before and after treating a wound or a cut.
- Before and after being with someone who is sick.
- Before preparing, serving, or eating food.

- After sneezing, coughing, or blowing your nose.
- After touching an animal or animal waste.
- After handling garbage.

And do not take it for granted that you are cleaning your hands properly. Studies have shown that a large percentage of those who use public toilets do not wash their hands afterward or do not wash them correctly. How should you wash your hands?

- Wet your hands in clean running water and apply soap.
- Rub your hands together to make a lather, not forgetting to clean your nails, your thumbs, the backs of your hands, and between your fingers.
- Keep rubbing for at least 20 seconds.
- Rinse in clean running water.
- Dry with a clean cloth or a paper towel.

Such measures are simple but can avert illness and save lives.





## 2

## USE A SAFE WATER SUPPLY

OBTAINING sufficient clean water for one's family is a regular chore in some countries. Yet, access to clean water can become a concern in *any* part of the world when a main supply that is usually good to drink becomes contaminated as a result of a flood, a storm, a pipe break, or some other issue. If water does not come from a safe source or is not stored correctly, it can cause parasite infestation, as well as cholera, life-threatening diarrhea, typhoid, hepatitis, and other infections. Unsafe drinking water is one of the causes of an estimated *1.7 billion* cases of diarrheal disease every year.

Cholera is most often contracted when a person drinks water or eats food that is contaminated with fecal matter from infected people. What steps can you take to protect yourself, even in the immediate aftermath of a disaster, from this and other types of water contamination?

- Ensure that all your drinking water—including the water used for brushing teeth, making ice, washing food and dishes, or cooking—comes from a safe source, such as an adequately treated public supply or sealed bottles from a reputable firm.
- If there is any possibility that your piped supply has been contaminated, boil your water before use or treat it with an appropriate chemical product.
- When using chemicals, such as chlorine or water-purifying tablets, follow the maker's directions carefully.
- Use quality water filters, if available and affordable.
- If no water-treatment products are available, add household bleach, eight drops per gallon of water (two drops per liter), mix well, and then let the water stand for 30 minutes before using it.
- Always store treated water in clean, covered containers to protect it from possible re-contamination.
- Ensure that any vessel used to take water from your stored supply, such as a ladle, is clean.
- Handle water containers with clean hands, and do not dip your hands or fingers into water used for drinking.

There is much you can do  
to slow down or prevent the  
onset of illness



# 3

## WATCH WHAT YOU EAT

GOOD health is impossible without good nutrition, and for good nutrition you need a healthy, balanced diet. You may need to consider your intake of salt, fats, and sugar, and you should watch your portion sizes. Include fruits and vegetables in your diet, and vary what you eat. Reading the packaging will help you to select whole-grain foods when buying bread, cereals, pasta, or rice. These are richer in nutrients and fiber than the alternatives made from refined grain. As for proteins, eat small and lean portions of meat and poultry and try to eat fish a couple of times a week, if possible. In some lands it is also possible to find protein-rich foods from vegetable sources.

If you eat too many sugars and solid fats, you risk becoming overweight. To minimize this risk, drink water instead of sweet beverages. Eat more fruit instead of sugary desserts. Limit your intake of solid fats from such items as sausages, meat, butter, cakes, cheese, and cookies. And instead of using solid fats for cooking, you may want to use healthier oils.

Too much salt, or sodium, in the diet can raise your blood pressure to an unhealthy level. If this is your problem, use the information on food packaging to keep your sodium intake low. Instead of salt, use herbs and spices to flavor your meals.

How *much* you eat can be as important as *what* you eat. So, while enjoying your food, do not keep eating after you are no longer hungry.

An issue tied to nutrition is the risk of food poisoning. Any food can poison you if it is not prepared and stored properly. Every year, 1 out of every 6 Americans falls sick from food poisoning. Most recover without lasting ill effects, but some die from it. What can you do to minimize the risk?

- Vegetables grow in soil that may have been treated with manure, so wash these items carefully before preparing them.
- Wash your hands, cutting board, utensils, dishes, and countertops with hot, soapy water before preparing each item.
- To avoid cross-contamination, never put food on a surface or plate that was previously in contact with raw eggs, poultry, meat, or fish, without first washing that surface.
- Cook until the food reaches the right temperature, and promptly refrigerate any perishable items that are not going to be eaten immediately.
- Discard perishable items left at room temperature for more than two hours or one hour if air temperature exceeds 90 degrees Fahrenheit (32 °C).



# 4

## STAY PHYSICALLY ACTIVE

REGARDLESS of your age, you need regular physical activity to stay in good shape. Many people today do not exercise enough. Why is exercise important? Staying physically active can help you to:

- Sleep well.
- Stay mobile.
- Maintain strong bones and muscles.
- Maintain or achieve a healthy weight.
- Lower your risk of suffering from depression.
- Lower your risk of premature death.

If you do *not* stay physically active, you are more likely to:

- Suffer from heart disease.
- Suffer from type 2 diabetes.
- Develop high blood pressure.
- Develop high cholesterol.
- Suffer a stroke.

The kind of physical activity that is right for you depends on your age and your health, so it would be wise to consult your doctor before beginning any new exercise program. According to various recommendations, children and adolescents should get at least 60 minutes of moderate-to-vigorous activity every day. Adults should get 150 minutes of moderate activity or 75 minutes of vigorous activity every week.

Choose an activity that is fun. You might consider basketball, tennis, soccer, brisk walking, cycling, gardening, chopping wood, swimming, canoeing, jogging, or other aerobic exercise. How can you tell whether an activity is moderate or vigorous? A general guide would be that moderate activity makes you sweat, but more vigorous exercise makes it hard for you to hold a conversation while doing it.

### SAFEGUARD YOUR HEALTH!

Your health is affected by realities over which you have no control—such as economic conditions, the availability of resources, and so on. In all likelihood, however, it should be within your means to adopt at least some of the suggestions given in the foregoing article. As a wise man of ancient times put it, “the shrewd one sees the danger and conceals himself.”—Proverbs 22:3.



# 5

## GET ENOUGH SLEEP

THE amount of sleep needed varies from person to person. Most newborns sleep for 16 to 18 hours a day, toddlers about 14 hours, and preschoolers about 11 or 12. School-age children generally need at least 10 hours of sleep, adolescents perhaps 9 or 10, and adults from 7 to 8.

Getting the right amount of rest should not be considered optional. According to experts, sufficient sleep is important for:

- Growth and development in children and teenagers.
- Learning and retention of new information.
- Maintaining the right balance of hormones that impact metabolism and weight.
- Cardiovascular health.
- Disease prevention.

Insufficient sleep has been linked to obesity, depression, heart disease, diabetes, and tragic accidents. Surely

these give us good reason to want to get enough rest.

So, what can you do if you realize that you have a problem getting enough sleep?

- Try to go to bed and get up at the same time every day.
- Make your bedroom quiet, dark, relaxing, and neither too warm nor too cold.
- Do not watch TV or use gadgets while in bed.
- Make your bed as comfortable as possible.
- Avoid heavy meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime.
- If after applying these suggestions you still suffer from insomnia or other sleep disorders—such as excessive daytime sleepiness or gasping for breath while sleeping—you may want to consult a qualified health-care professional.

Readers of the Holy Scriptures are comforted by the trustworthy promise that one day soon, “no resident will say: ‘I am sick.’” (Isaiah 33:24)\* In the meantime, do all you can to safeguard your health and that of your loved ones. ■

\* For more information, please see the book *What Does the Bible Really Teach?* published by Jehovah’s Witnesses, or visit our Web site, [jw.org](http://jw.org).



# How to Strengthen Commitment



## THE CHALLENGE

On the day you got married, you made a vow. That solemn promise was a lifelong commitment—a firm resolve to stick with your spouse and solve problems that would arise.

Over the years, however, the wear and tear of marital conflict has taken its toll. Do you still feel as strongly committed to your mate?



## WHAT YOU SHOULD KNOW

**Commitment is the solution, not the problem.** Many people today are skeptical of commitment. Some would compare commitment to a ball and chain that shackles you to a bad decision. Instead, think of it as an anchor that can keep your marriage steady. A wife named Megan says, “During a conflict, one of the best things about commitment is knowing that neither you nor your spouse is leaving.”\* Having confidence that the marriage itself is secure—even when certain aspects of it are in turmoil—can give you a foundation from which to resolve your problems.—See the box “Commitment and Loyalty.”

The bottom line: If you are experiencing problems in your marriage, now is the time to *strengthen* commitment, not *question* it. How can you do that?

\* The Bible allows for a married person to terminate the marital union on the grounds of a mate's sexual immorality. See the article “The Bible's Viewpoint—Adultery” in this issue of *Awake!*

Commitment is like an anchor that can keep your marriage steady





## WHAT YOU CAN DO

**Examine your view.** “Married for life.” Does that phrase make you feel trapped, or does it make you feel secure? When problems arise, does leaving always loom on the horizon as a viable option? To strengthen your commitment, it is essential that you view marriage as a permanent union.—*Bible principle: Matthew 19:6.*

**Examine your history.** Your view of commitment might be influenced by what you observed in your parents. “My parents divorced when I was growing up,” says a wife named Lea, “and I worry that their experience may have left me with a negative view of commitment.” Be assured that you *can* make things different in your own marriage. You are not doomed to repeat your parents’ mistakes!—*Bible principle: Galatians 6:4, 5.*

**Examine your speech.** In the heat of a disagreement with your spouse, refrain from saying things that you will later regret, such as “I’m leaving you!” or, “I’m going to find someone who appreciates me!” Such statements undermine commitment, and rather than address the issue at hand, they merely involve the two of you in an onslaught of insults. Instead of using hurtful speech, you might say something like this: “Obviously, we’re both upset. How can we work together to resolve this problem?”—*Bible principle: Proverbs 12:18.*

**Send out clear ‘commitment signals.’** Keep a photo of your spouse on your desk at work. Talk positively about your marriage to others. Make it a goal to call your spouse each day while you are away. Frequently talk about “we,” and use phrases such as “my wife and I” or “my husband and I.” By such actions, you will emphasize to others—and to yourself—that you are committed to your spouse.

**Find healthy role models.** Look to mature couples who have weathered marital problems successfully. Ask them, “What does commitment mean to you, and how has it helped you in your marriage?” The Bible says: “As iron sharpens iron, so one man sharpens his friend.” (Proverbs 27:17) With that principle in mind, why not benefit from the advice of those who have made their marriage a success? ■

## KEY SCRIPTURES

“What God has yoked together,  
let no man put apart.”  
—Matthew 19:6.

“Each one will carry his own  
load of responsibility.”  
—Galatians 6:5, footnote.

“Thoughtless speech is like the  
stabs of a sword, but the tongue  
of the wise is a healing.”  
—Proverbs 12:18.

## COMMITMENT AND LOYALTY

“If you and your mate are loyal to each other, you enjoy a sense of permanence about your union. When you think about the months, years, and decades ahead, you see yourselves together in the picture. The thought of not being married to each other is utterly foreign, and this outlook brings security to your relationship. One wife says: ‘Even when I’m maddest at [my husband] and I’m most upset about what is happening to us, I’m not worrying about our marriage coming to an end. I’m worried about how we are ever going to get back to where we were. I don’t have a doubt in the world that we’re going to get back—I just can’t see how right then.’”—From the September 15, 2003, issue of *The Watchtower*.



# GALILEO

Between the 14th and 16th centuries, European scientists and philosophers began to understand the universe in a way that conflicted with the teachings of the Catholic Church. One man who took a fresh look at the heavens was Galileo Galilei.

## QUICK FACTS

- ▶ Galileo Galilei was born in 1564 in Pisa, Italy, the city famous for its leaning tower. He taught at the University of Padua and later lived and worked in Florence.
- ▶ Although Galileo did not invent the telescope, he greatly improved its magnification and thus its usefulness.
- ▶ Because of his views on the universe, Galileo was twice called before the Inquisition—the Catholic tribunal responsible for the punishment of those who deviated from church doctrine.

**B**EFORE Galileo's time, many people believed that the sun, the planets, and the stars all revolved around the earth. That belief was part of the official dogma of the Catholic Church.

With his telescope, however, Galileo saw evidence that contradicted widely accepted scientific teachings. For example, as he watched sunspots appear to shift across the surface of the sun, he discerned that the sun rotates on an axis. Observations like this greatly increased man's knowledge of the universe, yet they would also result in Galileo's coming into direct conflict with the Catholic Church.

## SCIENCE AND RELIGION

Decades earlier, the Polish astronomer Nicolaus Copernicus developed a theory that the earth moves around the sun. Galileo studied Copernicus' work on the movements of celestial bodies and collected evidence in harmony with the theory. Initially, Galileo hesitated to publicize some of his observations, fearing that they would be met with ridicule and scorn.

# Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the Catholic Church had wrongly condemned Galileo

Unable to restrain his enthusiasm for what he saw through his telescope, he eventually went public with his discoveries. Some scientists found his arguments to be provocative, and soon clergymen were discrediting Galileo from their pulpits.

In 1616, Cardinal Bellarmine, “a leading theologian of the period,” informed Galileo of a newly issued Catholic decree against Copernicus’ ideas. He strongly urged Galileo to comply with that decree, and for years thereafter Galileo did not argue publicly that the earth moves around the sun.

In 1623, Pope Urban VIII, Galileo’s friend, began to reign. So in 1624, Galileo asked the pope to revoke the 1616 decree. Instead, Urban urged Galileo to explain the conflicting theories of Copernicus and Aristotle in a way that favored neither.

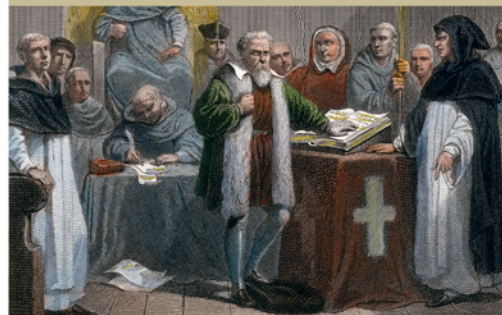
Galileo then wrote a book entitled *Dialogue on the Great World Systems*. Although the pope had ordered Galileo to be neutral, the book came across as favoring Copernicus’ conclusions. Soon Galileo’s enemies were claiming that his book ridiculed the pope. Accused of heresy and threatened with torture, Galileo was forced to deny the teachings of Copernicus. In 1633, the Roman Inquisition sentenced him to perpetual house arrest and banned his writings. Galileo died at home in Arcetri, near Florence, on January 8, 1642.

For hundreds of years, some of Galileo’s works remained on the index of books that Catholics were not permitted to read. But in 1979, the church reconsidered the action taken by the Roman Inquisition 300 years earlier. Finally, in 1992, Pope John Paul II acknowledged that the Catholic Church had wrongly condemned Galileo. ■

## Did the Inquisition Torture Galileo?

Some historians have suggested that the Roman Inquisition may have physically tortured Galileo. The sentence issued against him states that in order to establish Galileo’s real intentions, it was necessary to proceed against him by “rigorous examination.” In inquisitorial jargon this phrase often meant “torture,” possibly meaning at least “the verbal threat of physical torture.”

Specialists point out that there were stages and degrees of torture. It could include anything from merely showing the victim the instruments of torment to stripping or binding him or even inflicting physical pain with increasing severity. The nature of Galileo’s “rigorous examination” remains a mystery.







# ADULTERY

Despite the widely extolled virtues of marital fidelity, adultery continues to wreak havoc in many families.

## What is adultery?

**WHAT PEOPLE SAY** Some cultures do not view extramarital sex, especially on the part of husbands, as wrong. And some do not consider marriage to be a permanent union.

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** In the Bible, adultery generally refers to voluntary sexual relations by a married person—either a man or a woman—with someone other than his or her mate. (Job 24:15; Proverbs 30:20) Adultery is a detestable thing in God's eyes. In ancient Israel the penalty for it was death. (Leviticus 18:20, 22, 29) Jesus taught that his followers must refrain from adultery.—Matthew 5:27, 28; Luke 18:18-20.

**WHY IT MATTERS** Adulterers break the solemn vow that they made to their spouse at the time of their marriage. It is also a “sin against God.” (Genesis 39:7-9) Adultery can cruelly separate children from parents. What is more, the Bible warns that “God will judge . . . adulterers.” —Hebrews 13:4.

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*“Let marriage be honorable among all, and let the marriage bed be without defilement.”—Hebrews 13:4.*



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## Does adultery terminate the marital union?

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** The Bible allows for a married person to terminate his or her marital union on the grounds of a mate's sexual immorality. (Matthew 19:9) This means that after an act of infidelity, the innocent mate has the right to decide whether to remain with the unfaithful mate or to pursue a divorce. This is a personal decision.—Galatians 6:5.

On the other hand, in God's eyes marriage is a sacred lifelong bond. (1 Corinthians 7:39) God hates it when a person

seeks a divorce that is based on trivial reasons, such as simply not being satisfied with a mate. Therefore, a decision regarding divorce is not to be taken lightly.—Malachi 2:16; Matthew 19:3-6.

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*“I say to you that everyone divorcing his wife, except on account of sexual immorality, makes her a subject for adultery.”—Matthew 5:32.*

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## Is adultery an unforgivable sin?

**WHAT THE BIBLE SAYS** No. The Bible says that God shows mercy to those who repent and turn around from their sins—including adultery. (Acts 3:19; Galatians 5:19-21) In fact, the Bible talks about men and women who stopped committing adultery and later became God's friends.—1 Corinthians 6:9-11.

God's mercy was shown in the case of King David of ancient Israel. David committed adultery with the wife of one of his army officers. (2 Samuel 11:2-4) The Bible clearly states that “what David had done was very displeasing” to God. (2 Samuel 11:27) After receiving reproof, David repented and God forgave him. Nonetheless, David had to suffer the sad consequences of his actions. (2 Samuel 12:13, 14) Wise King Solomon later attested that “anyone committing adultery . . . is lacking good sense.”—Proverbs 6:32.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO** If you have committed adultery, you need to ask both God and

your spouse for forgiveness. (Psalm 51:1-5) Learn to hate adultery as God does. (Psalm 97:10) Be determined to avoid pornography, sexual fantasies, flirting, or anything else that could lead you to have sexual interest in someone other than your mate.—Matthew 5:27, 28; James 1:14, 15.

If you have been the victim of your mate's adultery, be assured that God understands your feelings. (Malachi 2:13, 14) Ask for his tender comfort and guidance, and “he will sustain you.” (Psalm 55:22) If you choose to forgive your mate and continue your marriage, both of you will need to work hard to rebuild your marital bond.—Ephesians 4:32. ■

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*“Jehovah, in turn, forgives your sin,” said the prophet Nathan to repentant David after his adultery.*  
—2 Samuel 12:13.

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# THE PARROT FISH

## A Sand-Making Machine?

**WHERE** does sand come from? There are many sources. But the one described in this article might surprise you. It is a fish that grinds coral into fine sand—the parrot fish!

Parrot fish live in various tropical waters throughout the world. After swallowing crushed coral, they extract tiny food morsels and then expel the rest in the form of sand. To do its job, the parrot fish uses its powerful beaklike jaws and strong back teeth. Some species can live as long as 20 years, without wearing out their teeth.

In some areas, by busily chomping away on dead coral, the parrot fish produces more sand than any other natural sand-making process. Some researchers estimate that a typical parrot fish produces hundreds of pounds (kg) of sand a year.

The parrot fish performs another vital task. As it grazes intensively on dead, algae-coated coral and vegetable material, it also keeps the coral clean. The peculiar diet of parrot fish thus maintains the reef in good condition. Where they and other grazers (herbivores) are absent, the reef quickly gets choked with algae and seaweed. “Some suggest that modern reefs would not exist in their present form if it were not for herbivores,” explains the book *Reef Life*.

All this activity during the day requires a good rest at night, and here again parrot fish are unusual. Nighttime is dangerous on the reef, since many predators are at large. Parrot fish usually sleep concealed under a ledge, but such a hiding place will not always protect them from a hungry shark.

For additional safety, some parrot fish wrap themselves up for the night. They secrete a protective mucus that envelops them, looking somewhat like a transparent nightgown. Marine scientists believe that this foul-smelling wrapping protects them from predators.

The parrot fish is one of the most visible and attractive fish of the reef. Male and female parrot fish often come in a whole palette of vivid colors, which change as they grow to adulthood. But best of all, parrot fish become quite tame in areas where they are not overfished. So they are some of the easiest fish to observe.

Getting up close to a parrot fish while watching and listening to it munch on coral is something few explorers of a coral reef will ever forget. And as parrot fish parade their finery, they keep their environment healthy for other reef creatures and us humans to enjoy. ■







▲ Steephead parrot fish

▼ Swarthy parrot fish

## PARROT-FISH FACTS

Parrot fish (known to scientists as Scaridae) are a large family of some 80 different species that frequent coral reefs throughout the Tropics. Their name comes from their distinctive mouth that looks somewhat like a parrot's beak. The length of parrot fish ranges from 20 to 40 inches (50 to 100 cm).





## SPOTLIGHT ON THE ENVIRONMENT

Although the earth produces clean air, nourishing food, and fresh water, humans are increasingly disrupting these natural processes. Scientists are desperately seeking solutions to reverse this trend.



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**AUSTRALIA** It is estimated that as much as 120,000 cubic miles (500,000 cu km) of low-salinity water lies beneath the floor of the world's oceans. "The sea level was [once] much lower than it is today," says Vincent Post of Flinders University in Adelaide, so the coastline was farther out. At that time, rain would "fill up the water table in areas that are nowadays under the sea." Scientists hope that these undersea reserves may in time help some of the over 700 million people who have limited access to clean water.

**SAHARA DESERT** Half the large animal species once found in the Sahara have either disappeared or are now confined to only 1 percent or less of their original range. Regional instability and widespread hunting are only partly to blame. Although the biodiversity of deserts rivals that of forests, researchers say that "the lack of scientific attention given to desert biodiversity is mirrored by a lack of financial support." As a result, it is difficult for conservationists to monitor endangered desert ecosystems.

**WORLD** It has been estimated that 1 in 8 deaths in 2012 occurred as a result of air pollution. According to the World Health Organization, "air pollution is now the world's largest single environmental health risk."

**TO THINK ABOUT:** Why are hardworking people with noble goals unable to stop the destruction of our environment?—Jeremiah 10:23.

