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SONG 108

God's Loyal Love

PREVIEW

What is loyal love? To whom does Jehovah show loyal love, and how do those who receive it benefit from it? The answers to these questions will be considered in the first of two articles that discuss this outstanding quality.

What Does Jehovah's Loyal Love Mean to You?

"[Jehovah's] loyal love endures forever."—PS. 136:1.

JEHOVAH takes delight in loyal love. (Hos. 6:6) He warmly encourages his servants to do the same. By means of the prophet Micah, our God urges us "to love loyal love." (Mic. 6:8, ftn.) Obviously, before we can do that, we need to know what loyal love is.

² What is loyal love? The expression "loyal love" occurs some 230 times in the *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*. What is it? According to the "Glossary of Bible Terms" found in that translation, it refers to "love motivated by commitment, integrity, loyalty, and deep attachment. It is often used in connection with God's love for humans, but it is also love shown between humans." Jehovah is the supreme example of loyal love. In this article, we will discuss how Jehovah shows loyal love to humans. In the following article, we will discuss how we as God's servants can imitate Jehovah by showing loyal love to one another.

JEHOVAH IS "ABUNDANT IN LOYAL LOVE"

³ Not long after Israel's Exodus from Egypt, Jehovah revealed himself to Moses by declaring His name and qualities. He said: "Jehovah, Jehovah, a God merciful and compassionate, slow to anger and abundant in loyal love and truth, showing loyal love to thousands, pardoning error and transgression and sin." (Ex. 34:6, 7) With this heartwarming statement about His qualities, Jeho-

1. What encouragement does Jehovah give us?
2. What are some characteristics of loyal love?
3. How did Jehovah reveal himself to Moses?

vah revealed to Moses a unique characteristic of His loyal love. What is it?

4 Jehovah described himself not merely as having loyal love but as being “abundant in loyal love.” That description is mentioned six more times in the Bible. (Num. 14:18; Neh. 9:17; Ps. 86:15; 103:8; Joel 2:13; Jonah 4:2) In all instances, that description refers only to Jehovah, never to humans. Is it not remarkable that Jehovah himself so strongly emphasized his quality of loyal love? No doubt, loyal love is important to him.* No wonder King David was moved to exclaim: “O Jehovah, your loyal love reaches to the heavens . . . How precious your loyal love is, O God! In the shadow of your wings, the sons of men take refuge.” (Ps. 36:5, 7) Like David, do we deeply appreciate God’s loyal love?

5 To deepen our understanding of loyal love, let us consider two questions: To whom does Jehovah show loyal love?

* The concept of God’s abundant loyal love is also mentioned in other Bible verses.—See Nehemiah 13:22; Psalm 69:13; 106:7; and Lamentations 3:32.

4-5. (a) How did Jehovah describe himself?
(b) What questions will we consider?

And how can we benefit from Jehovah’s acts of loyal love?

TO WHOM DOES JEHOVAH SHOW LOYAL LOVE?

6 To whom does Jehovah show loyal love? The Bible mentions that we can love many things, such as “agriculture,” “wine and oil,” “discipline,” “knowledge,” “wisdom”—to name a few. (2 Chron. 26:10; Prov. 12:1; 21:17; 29:3) Loyal love, however, is never extended to things or concepts; it is shown only to people. But Jehovah does not show loyal love to just anyone. He shows it *to those who are in a special relationship with him*. Our God is loyal to his friends. He has a wonderful purpose for them, and he will not give up on them.

7 Jehovah has shown *love* to mankind in general. Jesus told a man named Nicodemus: “God loved the world [of mankind] so much that he gave his only-begotten Son, so that everyone exercising faith in him might not be destroyed but have everlasting life.”—John 3:1, 16; Matt. 5:44, 45.

6. Jehovah shows loyal love to whom?

7. How has Jehovah shown love to mankind in general?



According to statements made by King David and by the prophet Daniel, Jehovah shows loyal love to those who know him, fear him, love him, and keep his commandments
(See paragraphs 8-9)



JEHOVAH'S LOVE

Jehovah provides many good things for the entire human family, even for those who do not worship him

(See paragraph 7)

Sunshine and rain



Flowers, plants, and trees



The opportunity to benefit from the ransom



⁸ As mentioned earlier, Jehovah shows his **loyal love** only to those who have an approved relationship with him—his servants. This is evident from statements made by King David and by the prophet Daniel. For example, David said: “Continue showing your loyal love to those who **know** you.” “The loyal love of Jehovah is for all eternity toward those who **fear** him.” And Daniel declared: “O Jehovah the true God, [who] shows loyal love to those who **love him** and **keep his commandments**.” (Ps. 36:10; 103:17; Dan. 9:4) According to these inspired expressions, Jehovah shows loyal love to his servants because they know him, fear him, love him, and keep his commandments. Jehovah reserves his loyal love for his people, his true worshippers.

⁹ Before we began serving Jehovah, we received the love that God shows to mankind in general. (Ps. 104:14) However, as his worshippers, we also benefit

from his loyal love. In fact, Jehovah assures his servants: “My loyal love will not be removed from you.” (Isa. 54:10) Indeed, as David himself experienced, “Jehovah will treat his loyal one in a special way.” (Ps. 4:3) How should we react to Jehovah’s special care for us? The psalmist noted: “Whoever is wise will observe these things and will carefully consider Jehovah’s acts of loyal love.” (Ps. 107:43) With that inspired advice in mind, let us consider three ways in which servants of Jehovah benefit from his acts of loyal love.

HOW CAN WE BENEFIT FROM JEHOVAH’S ACTS OF LOYAL LOVE?

¹⁰ **God’s loyal love is enduring.** This important aspect of loyal love is mentioned 26 times in Psalm 136. In the opening verse, we read: “Give thanks to Jehovah, for he is good; his loyal love endures forever.” (Ps. 136:1) In verses 2

8-9. (a) Why does Jehovah show loyal love to his servants? (b) What will we consider next?

10. How are we helped by God’s enduring loyal love? (Psalm 31:7)

JEHOVAH'S LOYAL LOVE

Jehovah gives additional blessings to those who worship him

(See paragraphs 10-16)



to 26, we find the refrain “for his loyal love endures forever.” As we read the remaining verses of this psalm, we cannot help but be impressed by the many ways in which Jehovah shows his loyal love without letup. The refrain “for his loyal love endures forever” assures us that God’s love for his people is not fickle. How heartening it is to know that Jehovah does not quickly give up on his servants! Instead, he attaches himself to those who serve him and he sticks with them, especially in times of distress. **How we benefit:** Knowing that Jehovah sticks with us gives us the joy and the strength we need to cope with our distresses and to keep walking on the path to life.—**Read Psalm 31:7.**

11 *God’s loyal love moves him to be forgiving.* When Jehovah observes a sinner who is repentant and who rejects his sinful course, loyal love moves Him to be forgiving. The psalmist David stat-

ed about Jehovah: “He has not dealt with us according to our sins, nor has he repaid us what our errors deserve.” (Ps. 103:8-11) David himself knew from painful experience how heavy the burden of a guilty conscience can be. But he also learned that Jehovah is “ready to forgive.” What moves Jehovah to be forgiving? The answer is recorded at **Psalm 86:5. (Read.)** Yes, as David said in prayer, Jehovah forgives because he abounds in loyal love for all those who call on him.

12 When we sin, it is appropriate—even healthy—to feel remorse. It can move us to repent and take steps to correct our mistakes. Some servants of God, though, have become overwhelmed by guilt because of past mistakes. Their self-condemning heart convinces them that Jehovah could never forgive them—no matter how repentant they are. If you deal with such feelings, learning

11. According to Psalm 86:5, what moves Jehovah to be forgiving?

12-13. If we are weighed down with guilt over past mistakes, what will help us?

about God's willingness to extend loyal love to his servants will help you.

¹³ **How we benefit:** In spite of our imperfections, we can joyfully serve Jehovah with a clean conscience. This is possible because "the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin." (1 John 1:7) When you are discouraged about some imperfection, call to mind that Jehovah is willing, yes, eager to forgive a repentant sinner. Note the connection that David made between loyal love and forgiveness. He wrote: "As the heavens are higher than the earth, so great is his loyal love toward those who fear him. As far off as the sunrise is from the sunset, so far off from us he has put our transgressions." (Ps. 103:11, 12) Indeed, Jehovah is willing to "forgive in a large way."—Isa. 55:7.

¹⁴ **God's loyal love provides spiritual protection.** In prayer to Jehovah, David stated: "You are a hiding place for me; you will safeguard me from distress. You will surround me with joyful shouts of deliverance. . . . The one trusting in Jehovah is surrounded by His loyal love." (Ps. 32:7, 10) Just as the walls surrounding an ancient city protected its citizens, so Jehovah's acts of loyal love surround us, providing spiritual protection from dangers that could test our integrity. Further, Jehovah's loyal love moves him to draw us to him.—Jer. 31:3.

¹⁵ David used another word picture to describe the protection that God's peo-

ple enjoy. He wrote: "God is my secure refuge, the God who shows loyal love to me." David also stated about Jehovah: "He is my loyal love and my stronghold, my secure refuge and my rescuer, my shield and the One in whom I have taken shelter." (Ps. 59:17; 144:2) Why did David connect Jehovah's loyal love with a refuge and a stronghold? No matter where we live on earth, as long as we are his servants, Jehovah will provide us with all the protection we need to safeguard our precious relationship with him. That same assurance is found in Psalm 91. The writer of that psalm declared: "I will say to Jehovah: 'You are my refuge and my stronghold.'" (Ps. 91:1-3, 9, 14) Moses used a similar word picture about a refuge. (Ps. 90:1, ftn.) Moreover, toward the end of his life, Moses called attention to a heartwarming detail. He wrote: "God is a refuge from ancient times, his everlasting arms are beneath you." (Deut. 33:27) What does the phrase "his everlasting arms are beneath you" tell us about Jehovah?

¹⁶ When Jehovah is our Refuge, we feel secure. Still, there may be days when we are down and struggle to get up. At such times, what will Jehovah do for us? **(Read Psalm 136:23.)** He will put his arms beneath us, gently lift us up, and help us to get back on our feet. (Ps. 28:9; 94:18) **How we benefit:** Knowing that we can always count on God's support helps us to remember that we are blessed in two ways. First, we have a secure place of refuge no matter where we

14. How did David describe the way God's loyal love protects us?

15. What connection is there between Jehovah's loyal love and a refuge and a stronghold?

16. In what two ways are we blessed? (Psalm 136:23)

live. Second, our loving heavenly Father deeply cares for us.

WHY GOD'S LOYAL LOVE GIVES US CONFIDENCE

¹⁷ As we have considered, when facing a trial, we can be sure that Jehovah will act in our behalf by giving us the support we need to keep our integrity. (2 Cor. 4:7-9) The prophet Jeremiah stated: "It is because of Jehovah's loyal love that we have not come to our finish, for his mercies never end." (Lam. 3:22) We can have confidence that Jehovah's loyal love will indeed rest on us because, as the psalmist assured us, "the eye of Jehovah watches over those fearing him, those waiting for his loyal love." —**Read Psalm 33:18-22.**

¹⁸ What do we want to keep in mind? Before we began serving Jehovah, we received the love that God shows to mankind in general. As his worshippers,

17. Because of God's loyal love, what confidence can we have? (Psalm 33:18-22)

18-19. (a) What do we want to keep in mind?
(b) What will we consider in the next article?

however, we also benefit from his loyal love. Moved by that love, Jehovah embraces us with his protective arms. He will always keep us close to him and will fulfill his purpose regarding us. He wants us to succeed! (Ps. 46:1, 2, 7) Therefore, no matter what trial we may face, Jehovah will give us the strength we need in order to keep our integrity.

¹⁹ We have seen how Jehovah shows loyal love to his servants. In turn, he expects us to show loyal love to one another. How can we do that? The next article will consider this important subject.

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS **Page 4:** Jehovah demonstrates his love to mankind as a whole, including his servants. The icons depicted above the group of people show some expressions of God's love. Foremost is the opportunity to benefit from the ransom arrangement. **Page 5:** Those who become servants of Jehovah and put faith in the ransom arrangement are treated by Jehovah in a special way. In addition to receiving the love that God shows to mankind in general, Jehovah's servants receive expressions of God's loyal love. Several of these are depicted by the icons.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- | | | |
|-----------------------|---|--|
| ■ What is loyal love? | ■ To whom does Jehovah show loyal love? | ■ Why are you grateful for Jehovah's loyal love? |
|-----------------------|---|--|

SONG 107

The Divine Pattern of Love

PREVIEW

Jehovah wants us to show loyal love to our brothers and sisters in the congregation. We can deepen our understanding of what loyal love is by examining how some of God's servants in the past showed this quality. In this article, we will consider what we can learn from the examples of Ruth, Naomi, and Boaz.

Continue Showing Loyal Love to One Another

“Deal with one another in loyal love and mercy.”—ZECH. 7:9.

WE HAVE good reasons to show loyal love to one another. What are some of them? Note how the following inspired proverbs answer that question: “Do not let loyal love and faithfulness leave you. . . . Then you will find favor and good insight in the eyes of God and man.” “A man of loyal love benefits himself.” “Whoever pursues righteousness and loyal love will find life.”—Prov. 3:3, 4; 11:17, ftn.; 21:21.

² These proverbs mention three reasons why we should show loyal love. First, showing loyal love makes us precious in God's eyes. Second, by showing loyal love, we benefit ourselves. For instance, we forge lasting friendships with others. Third, pursuing loyal love leads to future blessings, including everlasting life. Indeed, we have good reasons for heeding Jehovah's reminder: “Deal with one another in loyal love and mercy.”—Zech. 7:9.

³ In this article, we will consider the answers to four questions. To whom should we show loyal love? What can we learn from the book of Ruth about showing loyal love? How can we show loyal love today? What benefits come to those who show loyal love?

TO WHOM SHOULD WE SHOW LOYAL LOVE?

⁴ As we learned in the preceding article, Jehovah re-

- 1-2. What good reasons do we have to show loyal love to one another?
3. What questions will we consider in this article?
4. How can we imitate Jehovah in showing loyal love? (Mark 10:29, 30)

serves his loyal love—his enduring feelings of loving attachment—for those who love him and serve him. (Dan. 9:4) We want to be “imitators of God, as beloved children.” (Eph. 5:1) Therefore, we desire to develop warm feelings—a deep and enduring attachment—for our spiritual brothers and sisters.—**Read Mark 10:29, 30.**

⁵ You will surely agree that the better we understand the meaning of loyal love, the better we will be able to show it to our fellow worshippers. To deepen our understanding of loyal love, let us see how it compares with loyalty, as that term is commonly used. Consider an example.

⁶ Today we might describe someone who has worked for the same company for many years as a loyal employee. Yet, in all his years with the company, he may never have met any of the directors. He may not always agree with the policies of that company. He does not love the company, but he is happy to have a job that provides a paycheck. He will continue to work there until he retires, unless he is offered a better position elsewhere.

⁷ The difference between loyalty as discussed in paragraph 6 and loyal love is a person’s motive. In the Bible, what motive stands out in the acts of loyal love shown among God’s people? Those who showed loyal love did so, not because they had to, but because their hearts impelled them. Consider the ex-

ample of David. His heart moved him to show loyal love to his dear friend Jonathan even though Jonathan’s father wanted to kill David. Years after Jonathan’s death, David still continued to show loyal love to Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth.—1 Sam. 20:9, 14, 15; 2 Sam. 4:4; 8:15; 9:1, 6, 7.

⁸ We can learn much about loyal love by considering some passages from the Bible book of Ruth. What lessons about loyal love can we learn from the individuals featured in that book? How can we apply these lessons in our congregation?*

WHAT CAN WE LEARN FROM THE BOOK OF RUTH ABOUT SHOWING LOYAL LOVE?

⁹ In the book of Ruth, we read the story of Naomi, her daughter-in-law Ruth, and a God-fearing man named Boaz, who was a relative of Naomi’s husband. Because of a famine in Israel, Naomi, her husband, and two sons moved to Moab. While there, Naomi’s husband died. Her two sons got married, but sadly, they too died. (Ruth 1:3-5; 2:1) Those blows caused Naomi to sink deeper and deeper into despair. She became so overwhelmed by anguish that she concluded that Jehovah was opposing her. Note how she expressed her feelings about God: “The hand of Jehovah has turned against me.” “The Almighty has made life very bitter for me.” She also said: “It is Jehovah who opposed

5-6. The word “loyalty” may refer to what kind of relationship?

7-8. (a) What motivates someone to show loyal love? (b) Why will we consider some passages from the book of Ruth?

* To benefit fully from this article, we encourage you to read for yourself Ruth chapters 1 and 2.

9. Why did Naomi conclude that Jehovah was opposing her?



By listening, we can help a discouraged brother or sister

(See paragraph 12)

me and the Almighty who caused me calamity.”—Ruth 1:13, 20, 21.

¹⁰ How did Jehovah react to Naomi’s bitter words? He did not turn against his distraught servant. On the contrary, he showed empathy for her. Jehovah understands that “oppression can drive the wise one into madness.” (Eccl. 7:7) Still, Naomi needed help in order to see that Jehovah was on her side. What help did God provide? (1 Sam. 2:8) He moved Ruth to reach out and show loyal love to Naomi. Willingly and gently, Ruth helped her mother-in-law to regain her emotional and spiritual balance. What do we learn from Ruth’s example?

¹¹ ***Loyal love moves us to reach out to those in distress.*** Just as Ruth stuck with Naomi, kindhearted brothers and sisters

10. How did Jehovah react to Naomi’s bitter words?

11. Why do kindhearted brothers and sisters reach out to those who are distressed?

today willingly stick with those in the congregation who are despondent or depressed. They love their brothers and sisters, and they are eager to do whatever they can to help them. (Prov. 12:25, fn.; 24:10) This is in line with the apostle Paul’s admonition: “Speak consolingly to those who are depressed, support the weak, be patient toward all.” —1 Thess. 5:14.

¹² Often the most effective way you can help a discouraged brother or sister is by lending a listening ear and by reassuring him or her of your love. Your kind attention to one of Jehovah’s precious sheep does not go unnoticed by our God. (Ps. 41:1) Proverbs 19:17 states: “The one showing favor to the lowly is lending to Jehovah, and He will repay him for what he does.”

¹³ We gain further insight into loyal love by considering what happened to Naomi after the death of her husband and two sons. When Naomi learned that “Jehovah had turned his attention to his people by giving them food,” she decided to return to her home. (Ruth 1:6) Both daughters-in-law started out with her. Along the way, however, three times Naomi urged the women to return to Moab. What happened? We read: “Orpah kissed her mother-in-law and departed. But Ruth stuck with her.” (Ruth 1:7-14) By choosing to return, Orpah was following Naomi’s instructions, doing what was expected. Ruth, however,

12. What is often the most effective way to help a discouraged brother or sister?

13. How did Ruth differ from Orpah, and why was Ruth’s decision an act of loyal love? (See cover picture.)

went beyond that. She too was free to leave, but out of loyal love, she decided to stay to help her needy relative. (Ruth 1:16, 17) Ruth chose to stick with Naomi, not because she had to, but because she wanted to. Ruth's decision was an act of true loyal love. What lesson does this account contain?

¹⁴ ***Loyal love goes beyond what is expected.*** Today, as in the past, many of our brothers and sisters have chosen to show loyal love for fellow believers, even to those whom they do not know personally. For example, when they learn that a natural disaster has occurred, they immediately want to know how they can help. When someone in the congregation falls on hard times, they do not hesitate to reach out to that person and help in practical ways. Like the first-century Macedonians, they do more than what is expected. They make personal sacrifices, giving “even beyond their means” in order to help their less fortunate brothers. (2 Cor. 8:3) How pleased Jehovah must be with such a loving spirit!—**Read Hebrews 13:16.**

HOW CAN WE SHOW LOYAL LOVE TODAY?

¹⁵ We can learn a number of fine lessons by examining how Ruth helped Naomi. Let us consider a few.

¹⁶ ***Be persistent.*** When Ruth offered to accompany her mother-in-law to Judah, Naomi at first objected. But Ruth did not give up. What was the result? “When Na-

omi saw that Ruth insisted on going with her, she stopped trying to convince her.” —Ruth 1:15-18.

¹⁷ ***Application:*** It takes patience to help those who are depressed, but we should not give up on them. A sister in need of assistance may at first refuse our help.* Still, loyal love will move us to do our best to stick with her. (Gal. 6:2) We hope that she will eventually accept our hand of friendship and allow us to help lift her out of despair.

¹⁸ ***Do not take it personally.*** When Naomi and Ruth arrived in Bethlehem, Naomi met her former neighbors. She told them: “I was full when I went, but Jehovah made me return empty-handed.” (Ruth 1:21) Imagine how Ruth must have felt on hearing those words from Naomi! Ruth had gone out of her way to help Naomi. Ruth had wept with her, comforted her, and walked with her for days on end. Despite all of this, Naomi said: “Jehovah made me return empty-handed.” With those words, Naomi did not even acknowledge the support of Ruth, who was standing next to her. How painful that must have been for Ruth! Yet, she stuck with Naomi.

¹⁹ ***Application:*** Today, a sister in distress may initially speak to us in a hurtful way—despite all our efforts to help her. But we try not to take it personally.

* Because we are considering the example of Naomi, we refer to sisters in need. But the points in this article apply equally to brothers.

14. (a) Today, what choice do loving brothers and sisters make? (b) According to Hebrews 13:16, what sacrifices are pleasing to God?

15-16. How did Ruth show her persistence?

17. What will help us not to give up easily?

18. What must have been painful for Ruth?

19. What will help us to stick with someone who is distressed?

We stick with our sister who is in need, and we ask Jehovah to help us find a way to bring her comfort.—Prov. 17:17.

²⁰ **Give timely encouragement.** Ruth had shown loyal love to Naomi, but now Ruth herself needed encouragement. And Jehovah moved Boaz to encourage her. Boaz said to Ruth: “May Jehovah reward you for what you have done, and may there be a perfect wage for you from Jehovah the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to seek refuge.” Those heartwarming words touched Ruth deeply. In response, Ruth said to Boaz: “You have comforted me and spoken reassuringly to your servant.” (Ruth 2:12, 13) The timely words of Boaz gave Ruth the strength she needed to carry on.

20. What gave Ruth the strength she needed to carry on?

²¹ **Application:** Those who show loyal love to others sometimes need encouragement themselves. Just as Boaz reassured Ruth that her kindness had not gone unnoticed, observant elders today gratefully acknowledge the help that loving brothers and sisters provide. Such timely and warm commendation will give the brothers and sisters the strength they need to carry on.—**Read Isaiah 32: 1, 2.**

WHAT BENEFITS COME TO THOSE WHO SHOW LOYAL LOVE?

²² After some time had passed, Boaz provided a generous gift of food for Ruth and Naomi. (Ruth 2:14-18) What was Naomi’s reaction to Boaz’ generosity?

21. As described at Isaiah 32:1, 2, what will caring elders provide?

22-23. How did Naomi’s attitude change, and why? (Psalm 136:23, 26)



How can Christian elders
today imitate Boaz?
(See paragraphs 20-21)

ty? She said: “May he be blessed by Jehovah, who has not failed in his loyal love toward the living and the dead.” (Ruth 2:20a) What a turning point this was for Naomi! Earlier, she had cried out in pain: “Jehovah . . . opposed me,” but now she exclaimed with joy: “Jehovah . . . has not failed in his loyal love.” What might have contributed to Naomi’s changed attitude?

²³ Naomi finally began to see Jehovah’s hand in her life. Jehovah had used Ruth to give needed support on the journey to Judah. (Ruth 1:16) Naomi also saw Jehovah’s hand when Boaz, one of their “repurchasers,” lovingly made generous provisions for the two women.* (Ruth 2:19, 20b) ‘Now I understand,’ she must have thought, ‘Jehovah never left me. He has been with me this

* For more information on the role of Boaz as repurchaser, see the article “Imitate Their Faith—‘An Excellent Woman,’” in *The Watchtower* of October 1, 2012, p. 20.

whole time!’ **(Read Psalm 136:23, 26.)** How grateful Naomi must have been that Ruth and Boaz did not give up on her! We can imagine that all three rejoiced over that wonderful outcome.

²⁴ What have we learned from the book of Ruth about loyal love? Loyal love moves us not to give up easily on brothers and sisters who are in distress. It also moves us to make sacrifices in order to help them. Elders need to give timely and warm encouragement to those who extend loyal love to others. When we observe how those in need regain their spiritual strength, we feel deep joy. (Acts 20:35) What, though, is the foremost reason why we continue to show loyal love? Because we want to imitate and please Jehovah, who is “abundant in loyal love.”—Ex. 34:6; Ps. 33:22.

24. Why do we want to keep on showing loyal love to our fellow believers?

DO YOU REMEMBER?

- How does loyal love compare with loyalty?
- How can we imitate the examples of Boaz and Ruth in showing loyal love to others?
- How do we benefit from showing loyal love?

SONG 131

“What God Has
Yoked Together”

PREVIEW

Some decisions we make can affect the amount of time and energy we have available to serve Jehovah. Newly married couples in particular face decisions that can have a long-term impact on their life. This article will help them make wise decisions that lead to a happy, meaningful life.

Newly Married Couples —Build Your Life Around Serving Jehovah

“Jehovah is my strength . . . In him my heart trusts.”—PS. 28:7.

ARE you about to get married, or are you newly married? If so, no doubt you look forward to enjoying life with the person you love so deeply. Of course, marriage has its challenges, and there are important decisions to make. The way you approach those challenges and decisions will affect your happiness as a couple for years to come. If you rely on Jehovah, you will make wise decisions, your marriage will grow stronger, and you will be happier. If you fail to take into account God’s thinking, you will likely encounter problems that will put a strain on your marriage, leading to unhappiness.—**Read Psalm 37:3, 4.**

² Although this article is directed to newly married couples, it will discuss challenges that all married couples might face. It will highlight what we can learn from the examples set by some faithful men and women of the Bible. These Bible examples teach us lessons that we can apply in various areas of life, including marriage. We will also see what we can learn from the experiences of some modern-day couples.

WHAT CHALLENGES MIGHT NEWLY MARRIED COUPLES FACE?

³ Some people may encourage a newly married couple to live a so-called normal life. For example, par-

1-2. (a) Why should newly married couples trust in Jehovah? (Psalm 37:3, 4) (b) What will we consider in this article?

3-4. What challenges might newly married couples face?

ents and other relatives might pressure a couple to start having children as soon as possible. Or well-meaning friends and family members might urge newlyweds to buy a house and fill it with nice things.

⁴ If not careful, a couple might make decisions that cause them to incur burdensome debts. Then, both husband and wife will likely have to work long hours in order to pay off those debts. Secular work could begin to cut into the time that should be spent in personal Bible study, family worship, and the ministry. The couple may even miss meetings to work overtime in order to earn extra money or to ensure that they can keep their jobs. As a result, they miss out on exciting opportunities to expand their service to Jehovah.

⁵ Experience shows that focusing our life on gaining material things does not lead to happiness. Consider what a couple named Klaus and Marisa learned in this regard.* At the start of their married life, they both worked full-time so that they could live comfortably. Deep down, however, they did not feel satisfied. Klaus admits: “We had more than we needed materially, but spiritually we had no goals. To be honest, life was complicated and stressful.” Perhaps you too have noticed that focusing on gaining material things has not brought you satisfaction. If so, do not be discouraged. Considering the good examples of others can help you in this regard. First, let us consider what hus-

* Some names have been changed.

5. What do you learn from the example of Klaus and Marisa?



What decisions may prevent newlyweds from expanding their service to Jehovah?
(See paragraphs 3-4)

bands can learn from the example set by King Jehoshaphat.

LIKE KING JEHOSEPHATH, TRUST IN JEHOVAH

⁶ Husbands, do you sometimes feel overwhelmed by your responsibilities? If so, you can benefit from King Jehoshaphat's example. As king, Jehoshaphat was responsible for the welfare of the entire nation! How did he handle that extraordinary responsibility? Jehoshaphat did what he could to protect those under his care. He fortified the cities of Judah and assembled a mighty force of more than 1,160,000 soldiers. (2 Chron. 17:12-19) Later, Jehoshaphat was confronted with a serious challenge. A large army of Ammonites, Moabites, and men of the mountainous region of Seir threatened him, his family, and his people. (2 Chron. 20:1, 2) What did Jehoshaphat do? He looked to Jehovah for help and strength. This was in harmony with the wise counsel found at **Proverbs**

6. In harmony with the counsel recorded at Proverbs 3:5, 6, how did King Jehoshaphat meet a serious challenge?

3:5, 6. (Read.) Jehoshaphat's humble prayer, recorded at 2 Chronicles 20:5-12, reveals just how much he trusted in his loving heavenly Father. How did Jehovah respond to Jehoshaphat's prayer?

⁷ Jehovah spoke to Jehoshaphat by means of a Levite named Jahaziel. Jehovah said: "Take your position, stand still, and see the salvation of Jehovah in your behalf." (2 Chron. 20:13-17) That certainly is not the usual way to fight a battle! However, those instructions were not from a human source; they came from Jehovah. With full trust in his God, Jehoshaphat did as he was told. When he and the people went out to meet the enemy, he placed at the front of his troops, not the most skilled soldiers, but the unarmed singers. Jehovah did not let Jehoshaphat down; He defeated the enemy army.—2 Chron. 20:18-23.

⁸ Husbands, you can learn from Jehoshaphat's example. You are responsible for the welfare of your family, so you work hard to protect and support your family. When you face challenges, you may feel that you have the resources to handle the problem on your own. However, resist the inclination to rely on your own strength. Instead, pray privately for Jehovah's help. In addition, pray fervently with your wife. Seek direction from Jehovah by studying the Bible and publications provided by God's organization, and apply the counsel you find. Others might

not agree with the Bible-based decisions you make, and they might even tell you that you are being foolish. They might say that money and the things it can buy will provide the best protection for your family. But remember the example of Jehoshaphat. He trusted in Jehovah and proved it by his actions. Jehovah did not abandon that loyal man, and he will not abandon you. (Ps. 37:28; Heb. 13:5) What can couples do to ensure that they have a rewarding life together?

**LIKE THE PROPHET ISAIAH AND
HIS WIFE, BUILD YOUR LIFE
AROUND SERVING JEHOVAH**

⁹ The prophet Isaiah and his wife centered their life on serving Jehovah. Isaiah was a prophet, and it may well be that his wife had her own prophetic assignments, since she is called "the prophetess." (Isa. 8:1-4) As a couple, Isaiah and his wife were evidently focused on their worship of Jehovah. What an excellent example they set for married couples today!

¹⁰ Married couples today can build their life around serving Jehovah by doing all they can in his service. They can reinforce their trust in Jehovah by studying Bible prophecy together and seeing how it always comes true.* (Titus 1:2) They can reflect on the share they can have in the fulfillment of certain Bi-

* As an example, consider the lessons found in chapters 6, 7, and 19 of the book *Pure Worship of Jehovah—Restored At Last!*

7. How did Jehovah respond to Jehoshaphat's prayer?

8. What can husbands learn from Jehoshaphat's example?

9. What can be said about the prophet Isaiah and his wife?

10. How can studying Bible prophecy help married couples be determined to do as much as possible for Jehovah?



Newly married couples can build their life around serving Jehovah by praying, studying his Word, setting spiritual goals, and seeking advice from mature ones (See paragraphs 8, 10, 13, 16)

ble prophecies. For example, they can have a part in fulfilling Jesus' prophecy that the good news will be preached in all the earth before the end comes. (Matt. 24:14) The more a couple are certain that Bible prophecy is coming true, the greater will be their determination to do as much as possible for Jehovah.

LIKE PRISCILLA AND AQUILA, PUT KINGDOM INTERESTS FIRST

¹¹ Young married couples can learn from Priscilla and Aquila, a Jewish couple who lived in the city of Rome. They had heard the good news about Jesus and had become Christians. No doubt, they were satisfied with their circumstances. However, life took an unexpected turn for them when Emperor Claudius ordered all the Jews to leave Rome. Consider what that meant for Aquila and Priscilla. They would have to leave familiar surroundings, set up a new home, and establish their tentmaking business

in a new location. Would this disruption to their life cause them to push Kingdom interests into the background? You likely know the answer to that question. In their new home in Corinth, Aquila and Priscilla got involved with the local congregation and worked along with the apostle Paul to strengthen the brothers there. Later, they moved to other towns where there was a greater need for preachers. (Acts 18:18-21; Rom. 16: 3-5) What a rich and rewarding life they must have enjoyed together!

¹² Modern-day couples can imitate Priscilla and Aquila by putting Kingdom interests first. The best time for a couple to talk about their goals in life is while they are courting. When a couple make decisions together and strive to reach common spiritual goals, they have more opportunities to see Jehovah's spirit at work in their life. (Eccl. 4:9, 12) Consider the experience of Russell and

11. What were Priscilla and Aquila able to do, and why?

12. Why should a married couple set spiritual goals?

Elizabeth. Russell says, “During courtship, we specifically discussed our spiritual goals.” Elizabeth says, “We had that discussion so that later when faced with various decisions, we would make sure that our choices would not prevent us from reaching those goals.” The circumstances of Russell and Elizabeth allowed them to move to Micronesia to serve where the need for publishers was greater.

¹³ Like Russell and Elizabeth, many couples have made the decision to devote as much time as possible to the preaching and teaching work by keeping free from other commitments. When a couple set worthwhile goals in Jehovah’s service and then work together to achieve them, much good will result. They will see how Jehovah cares for them, their trust in him will grow, and they will become genuinely happy.—**Read Psalm 28:7.**

LIKE THE APOSTLE PETER AND HIS WIFE, TRUST JEHOVAH’S PROMISES

¹⁴ Married couples can also learn from the example set by the apostle Peter and his wife. About six months to a year after his first encounter with Jesus, the apostle Peter had to make an important decision. Peter made his living in the fishing business. So when Jesus invited Peter to follow him full-time, Peter had to take into account his family situation. (Luke

5:1-11) Peter chose to accompany Jesus in his preaching activity. He chose wisely! And we have good reason to conclude that Peter’s wife supported his decision. The Bible indicates that after Jesus’ resurrection, she traveled with Peter for at least some of the time. (1 Cor. 9:5) Undoubtedly, her example as a Christian wife gave Peter freedom of speech to record inspired counsel for Christian husbands and wives. (1 Pet. 3:1-7) Obviously, both Peter and his wife trusted Jehovah’s promise that He would provide for them if they put the Kingdom first in their life.—**Read Matthew 6:25, 31-34.**

¹⁵ If you have been married for a few years now, how can you continue to cultivate the desire to expand your ministry? One way is by taking note of the experiences of other couples. For instance, you could read the series “They Offered Themselves Willingly.” Such articles helped Tiago and Esther, a married couple from Brazil, to develop a strong desire to serve where the need is greater. Tiago explains: “As we read experiences of how Jehovah helped his servants in modern times, we too wanted to feel Jehovah’s hand guiding us and caring for us.” They eventually moved to Paraguay, where they have been serving in the Portuguese field since 2014. Esther says: “One text that we both love very much is Ephesians 3:20. Time and again, we have seen those words come true in our service to Jehovah.” In

13. According to Psalm 28:7, what will be the outcome when we trust in Jehovah?

14. How did the apostle Peter and his wife show that they trusted the promise found at Matthew 6:25, 31-34?

15. What do you learn from the experience of Tiago and Esther?

that letter to the Ephesians, Paul promised that Jehovah would provide much more than what we ask for. How true that promise is!

¹⁶ Young couples today can benefit from the experience of others who have learned to rely on Jehovah. Some couples may have spent decades serving in the full-time ministry. Why not seek their advice if you feel the need to assess your goals? This is another way to show that you are trusting in Jehovah. (Prov. 22:17, 19) Elders too can help young married couples set and reach spiritual goals.

¹⁷ At times, though, our decision to expand our service may not turn out as we expected. Take the example of Klaus and Marisa, mentioned at the outset. After being married for three years, they moved away from their home and volunteered to do construction work at the Finland branch. However, they learned that they would not be allowed to stay there for more than six months. At first, they felt disappointed. But as

16. Whose advice can young couples seek when assessing their goals in life?

17. What happened to Klaus and Marisa, and what do we learn from their experience?

things turned out, they were soon invited to attend an Arabic language course, and they are now happily serving in the Arabic-speaking field in another country. In retrospect, Marisa admits: “It is scary to step out of your comfort zone and trust in Jehovah completely. But I have seen how Jehovah has always helped us in unexpected ways. After experiencing this, my trust in Jehovah has grown stronger.” As this example shows, you can be certain that Jehovah will always reward you if you trust in him completely.

¹⁸ Marriage is a gift from Jehovah. (Matt. 19:5, 6) He wants married couples to enjoy that gift. (Prov. 5:18) Young couples, why not examine how you are spending your life? Are you doing all you can to show Jehovah how much you appreciate the gifts he has given you? Talk to Jehovah in prayer. Search his Word for principles that apply to your situation. Then heed the advice that Jehovah gives you. You can be certain that you will have a happy and rewarding life if you build your marriage around serving Jehovah!

18. What can married couples do to keep trusting in Jehovah?

WHAT DID YOU LEARN ABOUT TRUSTING IN JEHOVAH FROM . . .

■ the prophet Isaiah and his wife?

■ Priscilla and Aquila?

■ the apostle Peter and his wife?

SONG 119

We Must Have Faith

PREVIEW

We look forward to the end of this system of things. However, at times we may wonder whether our faith will be strong enough to carry us through that period. In this article, we will consider experiences and practical lessons that can help us to strengthen our faith.

How Strong Will Your Faith Be?

“Do not let your hearts be troubled. Exercise faith.”

—JOHN 14:1.

DO YOU sometimes feel anxious when you think about the events that lie ahead of us—the destruction of false religion, the attack of Gog of Magog, and the war of Armageddon? Do you ever ask yourself, ‘When the time comes, will I be able to pass through these fear-inspiring events with my integrity intact?’ If such thoughts have crossed your mind, this discussion of Jesus’ words, as recorded in our theme text, should prove to be most helpful. Jesus told his disciples: “Do not let your hearts be troubled. Exercise faith.” (John 14:1) Strong faith will help us to face the future with confidence.

² We can strengthen our faith to endure future trials by considering how we deal with tests of faith now. When we give thought to the way we react when faced with current tests, we can learn of areas where we need to strengthen our faith. With each test we pass, our faith becomes stronger. This will help us to endure future trials. In this article, we will review four situations that Jesus’ disciples faced that revealed the need for them to have more faith. We will then consider how we might face similar challenges today and how these can prepare us for the future.

FAITH THAT GOD WILL PROVIDE MATERIALLY

³ It is natural for a family head to want to provide sufficient food, clothing, and shelter for his wife and chil-

1. What question might we ask ourselves?
2. How can we strengthen our faith, and what will we consider in this article?
3. As recorded at Matthew 6:30, 33, what point about faith did Jesus make clear?



We may face economic hardship, but our faith will help us to stay focused on Kingdom interests
(See paragraphs 3-6)

dren. This is not always easy to do in these difficult times. In some cases, our fellow believers have lost their job and, despite diligent efforts, have been unable to find another one. Others have had to turn down employment that is not suitable for Christians. In all such cases, we need strong faith that Jehovah will in some way see to it that we have what we need for our family. Jesus made this clear to his disciples in the Sermon on the Mount. **(Read Matthew 6:30, 33.)** When we are absolutely convinced that Jehovah will not abandon us, we will be able to focus our attention where it belongs—on Kingdom interests. As we see how Jehovah is helping us with our material needs, he will become more real to us and our faith will be strengthened.

⁴ Consider how a family in Venezuela experienced Jehovah’s help when dealing with anxieties about their material needs. At one time, the Castro family earned a modest living by working their farm. Then, an armed gang took over their property and forced the family to abandon their land. The father, Miguel, states: “We now largely depend on what we can cultivate on a small piece of borrowed land. I begin every day by asking Jehovah to provide what we need for

that day.” Life is difficult for this family, but with full faith in our loving Father’s ability to care for their daily needs, the Castro family regularly attend congregation meetings and share in the field ministry. They put Kingdom interests first in their life, and Jehovah provides what they need.

⁵ Throughout their hardship, Miguel and his wife, Yurai, have focused on how Jehovah has cared for them. At times, Jehovah has used fellow believers to provide modest material aid or to help Miguel find suitable secular work. At other times, Jehovah has made the basic necessities available through the relief efforts of the branch office. Jehovah has never abandoned them. As a result, they have seen their family’s faith grow. After relating a specific instance in which Jehovah helped them, their oldest daughter, Yoselin, says: “It is touching to see Jehovah’s hand so clearly. I think of him as a friend whom I can depend on for life.” She adds: “The tests we have been through as a family have prepared us for harder tests in the future.”

⁶ Are you facing economic hardship? If so, this is a difficult time for you. However, as challenging as your circumstances are, you can use this time to

4-5. What helped one family deal with anxieties about their material needs?

6. How can you strengthen your faith when you face economic hardship?

Strong faith can help us to weather any great storm, literal or figurative (See paragraphs 7-11)



build your faith. Prayerfully read Jesus' words recorded at Matthew 6:25-34 and meditate on them. Consider modern-day experiences that prove that Jehovah provides for those who stay busy in theocratic activities. (1 Cor. 15:58) Doing so will strengthen your confidence that just as your heavenly Father has helped others in similar circumstances, he will help you. He knows what you need, and he knows how to provide it. As you experience Jehovah's help in your life, your faith will grow stronger so that you can endure greater trials in the future.—Hab. 3:17, 18.

FAITH TO ENDURE “A GREAT STORM”

⁷ When Jesus and his disciples were caught in a storm at sea, Jesus used the event to help them see areas where they needed greater faith. **(Read Matthew 8:23-26.)** As the storm raged on and water swept over the boat, Jesus was sleeping peacefully. When the terrified disciples woke him and asked him to save them, the Lord gently reprimanded them: “Why are you so afraid, you with little faith?” The fearful disciples should have realized that Jehovah was perfectly capable of protecting Jesus and those with him from harm. Do you see how we can ap-

ply the lesson? Strong faith can help us to weather any “great storm,” be it literal or figurative.

⁸ Consider how Anel, a single sister from Puerto Rico, came through a difficult test with stronger faith. Her “great storm” was a literal one. The test began in 2017 when Hurricane Maria destroyed Anel's home. As a result of the storm, she lost her job. “During those difficult days, I felt anxious,” admits Anel, “but I learned to trust in Jehovah through prayer and not let anxiety paralyze me.”

⁹ Anel mentions something else that helped her deal with her trial—obedience. She says: “Following the direction of the organization helped me to remain calm. I saw Jehovah's hand in the spiritual encouragement I received as well as in the material assistance provided by the brotherhood.” She adds: “Jehovah gave me much more than I could even ask for, and my faith was greatly strengthened.”

¹⁰ Are you facing “a great storm” in your life? It might involve hardship because of a natural disaster. Or it may be a figurative storm, such as a severe health problem that has left you feeling overwhelmed and unsure of what to do. You

7. According to Matthew 8:23-26, how did “a great storm” test the disciples' faith?

8-9. How was Anel's faith tested, and what helped her?

10. What can you do if you face “a great storm”?

may be anxious at times, but do not let your anxiety stop you from trusting in Jehovah. Draw close to him in earnest prayer. Strengthen your faith by meditating on the times in the past when Jehovah helped you. (Ps. 77:11, 12) You can be sure that he will never abandon you—not now, not ever.

¹¹ What else can help you to endure trials? As Anel pointed out, obedience. Learn to trust those whom Jehovah and Jesus trust. At times, those appointed to take the lead may give direction that does not make sense to us. However, Jehovah blesses obedience. We know from his Word and from the experiences of faithful servants that obedience saves lives. (Ex. 14:1-4; 2 Chron. 20:17) Meditate on such examples. Doing so will strengthen your resolve to cooperate with organizational arrangements now and in the future. (Heb. 13:17) You will thus have no reason to fear the greater storm that is soon to come.—Prov. 3:25.

FAITH TO COPE WITH INJUSTICE

¹² Jesus knew that injustice would challenge the faith of his disciples. To help them deal with it, he gave an illus-

11. Why should we be resolved to be obedient to those taking the lead?

12. What connection does Luke 18:1-8 make between having faith and enduring injustice?

tration that is recorded in the book of Luke. Jesus told the story of a widow who kept crying out to an unrighteous judge for justice. She was confident that her persistence would pay off. Eventually, the judge responded to her pleas. The application? Jehovah is not unjust. So Jesus said: “Certainly, then, will not God cause justice to be done for his chosen ones who cry out to him day and night?” **(Read Luke 18:1-8.)** Then Jesus added: “When the Son of man arrives, will he really find *this faith* on the earth?” When we suffer injustice, we need to prove by our patience and perseverance that we have strong faith like that of the widow. With such faith, we can be confident that sooner or later Jehovah will act in our behalf. We also need to believe in the power of prayer. At times, our prayers may bring unexpected results.

¹³ Consider the experience of a sister named Vero, who lives in the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Vero, her unbelieving husband, and their 15-year-old daughter had to flee their village when it was attacked by a militia group. Along the way, the family came to a roadblock where the militia detained them and threatened to execute them. When Vero began to cry, her daughter tried to calm

13. How did prayer help one family who were unjustly treated?



Our persistent prayers
will strengthen our faith
(See paragraph 12)

We may feel great sorrow, but faith will help us to stay busy serving Jehovah (See paragraph 16)



her by praying out loud and by repeatedly using Jehovah's name in her prayer. When she finished, the commander of the militia group asked, "Young girl, who taught you to pray?" She replied, "My mother did, using the pattern that is found at Matthew 6:9-13." The commander said, "Young girl, go with your parents in peace, and may Jehovah your God protect you!"

¹⁴ Such experiences teach us never to underestimate the value of prayer. But what if your prayers are not answered quickly or dramatically? Like the widow in Jesus' illustration, keep praying, confident that our God will not abandon you and that he will in time and in some way answer your prayer. Continue to beg Jehovah for his holy spirit. (Phil. 4:13) Remember that soon Jehovah will bless you so richly that you will forget any past suffering. As you faithfully endure trials with Jehovah's help, you will be strengthened for the days ahead.—1 Pet. 1:6, 7.

FAITH TO OVERCOME OBSTACLES

¹⁵ Jesus taught his disciples that faith would help them overcome obstacles.

14. What may test our faith, and what will help us to endure?

15. As recorded at Matthew 17:19, 20, what challenge did Jesus' disciples face?

(Read Matthew 17:19, 20.) On one occasion, they could not expel a demon, even though they had successfully done so at other times. What was the problem? Jesus explained that they needed more faith. He told them that with sufficient faith they would be able to move mountainlike obstacles! Today, we too may face challenges that seem insurmountable.

¹⁶ Note the example of Geydi, a sister from Guatemala. Her husband, Edi, was murdered as they were returning home from a congregation meeting. How has Geydi's faith helped her to cope with her great sorrow? She states: "Prayer helps me throw my burden on Jehovah, which makes me feel peace. I see Jehovah's care for me through my family and my friends in the congregation. Staying busy in Jehovah's service eases my pain and helps me to take one day at a time without worrying too much about tomorrow. After going through this experience, I have learned that no matter what kind of test may come in the future, I will be able to face it with the help of Jehovah, Jesus, and the organization."

¹⁷ Are you mourning the death of a

16. How has faith helped Geydi deal with tragedy and great sorrow?

17. What can we do when confronted by a mountainlike obstacle?

loved one? Take time to strengthen your faith in the resurrection hope by reading Bible accounts of those who were raised from the dead. Are you grieving because a family member was disfellowshipped? Study in order to convince yourself that God's way of administering discipline is always best. Whatever problem is confronting you, use it as an opportunity to build your faith. Pour your heart out to Jehovah. Do not isolate yourself, but instead remain close to your brothers and sisters. (Prov. 18:1) Share in activities that will help you to endure, even if you have to do so with tears. (Ps. 126:5, 6) Keep up with your routine of meetings, field service, and Bible reading. And stay focused on the wonderful blessings that Jehovah has in store for you. As you see how Jehovah helps you, your faith in him will grow ever stronger.

"GIVE US MORE FAITH"

¹⁸ If your trials, past or present, have exposed a weakness in your faith, do not be discouraged. See this as an opportunity to strengthen your faith. Make the

18. If you detect a weakness in your faith, what can you do?

same request as did Jesus' apostles, who said: "Give us more faith." (Luke 17:5) Also, reflect on the examples that we have discussed in this article. Like Miguel and Yurai, remember all the times when Jehovah provided help. Like Vero's daughter and Anel, pray fervently to Jehovah, especially when facing a crisis. And like Geydi, recognize that Jehovah may provide the needed help by means of family or friends. When you allow Jehovah to help you get through your present trials, you will become more confident that he will help you endure any trials you may face in the future.

¹⁹ Jesus pointed out areas where his disciples lacked faith, but he never doubted that with Jehovah's help they would pass future tests successfully. (John 14:1; 16:33) He was confident that strong faith would allow a great crowd to survive the coming great tribulation. (Rev. 7:9, 14) Will you be among them? By Jehovah's undeserved kindness, you will be if you take advantage of every opportunity now to develop and strengthen your faith!—Heb. 10:39.

19. What confidence did Jesus have, and of what can you be certain?

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- How can you prepare for future tests of faith?
- What four tests might we face now, and how can they help us?
- Why can you be confident that you can remain faithful?

My Search for a Life Rich in Purpose

AS TOLD BY MARTIN WITHOLT



WHILE sailing in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, I discovered to my shock that my old sailboat was leaking so badly that it was taking on gallons and gallons of water. Then a storm blew in. I became afraid and prayed for the first time in many years. How did I get into this situation? Let me start at the beginning.

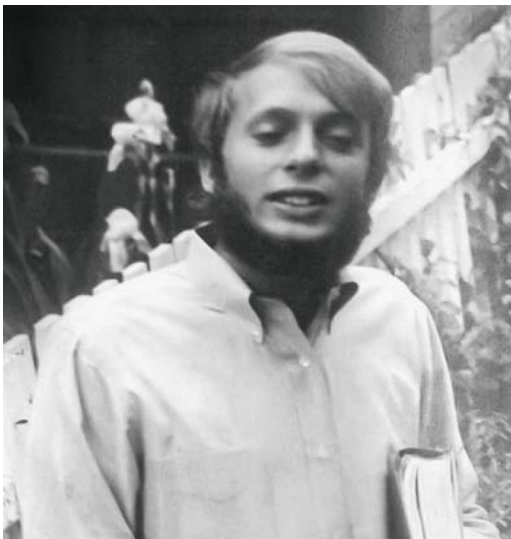
I was born in the Netherlands in 1948. The next year, my family moved to São Paulo, Brazil. My parents were very active in the church, and as a family we regularly read the Bible after supper. We emigrated again in 1959 but this time to the United States, where we settled in the state of Massachusetts.

Father worked hard to care for our family of eight. He was variously employed as a traveling salesman, a road construction worker, and a sales representative for an international airline. All in the family were delighted when he got the job with the airline because it allowed us to travel widely.

During high school, I often thought, 'What am I going to do when I grow up?' Some of my friends chose university, while others went into military service. But for me, the military was out of the question because I never liked quarreling, let alone fighting. I decided to go to university in order to avoid military service. Deep down, though,



When I was seven years of age, my family and I lived in Brazil



**For years, I searched
for a purpose in life**

I wanted to help others, reasoning that it would give real purpose to my life.

LIFE ON CAMPUS

At the university, anthropology interested me, since I was curious about the origin of life. We were taught evolution and were expected to accept it as factual. But to me some explanations lacked logic and required blind faith, which is contrary to the scientific method.

In the classes that I attended, we were not taught elevated morals. Rather, the emphasis was on how to succeed at all costs. Socializing at parties and experimenting with drugs gave me a happy feeling, but it was fleeting. I wondered, 'Is this really life with a purpose?'

In the meantime, I moved to the city of Boston and enrolled at a university there. To pay for my schooling, I took a summer job where I had my first contact with Jehovah's Witnesses. A workmate spoke to me about the prophecy of the "seven times" found in Daniel chapter 4 and explained that we were living in the time of the end. (Dan.

4:13-17) I quickly realized that if I continued to have these discussions and took them seriously, I would have to change my lifestyle. So I avoided that workmate in every way possible.

At the university, I took courses that would prepare me for volunteer work in South America. I thought that helping others in a humanitarian way would give purpose to my life. But my doubts about how to find a purposeful life grew stronger. Disillusioned, I dropped out of university at the end of the semester.

MY SEARCH FOR A LIFE WITH PURPOSE CONTINUES IN DISTANT LANDS

In May 1970, I moved to Amsterdam, in the Netherlands, to work for the same airline as my father did. Because of this job, I was able to travel extensively, visiting countries in Africa, the Americas, Europe, and the Far East. I soon realized that no matter what country I visited, they all faced major problems and no one seemed to have practical solutions. With a renewed desire to accomplish something worthwhile, I decided to go back to the United States and enroll again at the same university in Boston.

Back at school, though, I realized before long that I was still not getting any answers to my questions about life. At a loss for what to do, I asked my anthropology professor for advice. He surprised me when he said: "Why continue? Why not quit now?" He only had to tell me once. So I left university for good.

Life still seemed devoid of purpose, so I decided to become more involved with the so-called flower-power generation. Some friends and I hitchhiked across the United States and down to Acapulco, Mexico. We lived in communes with hippies, who seemed to have a carefree life. But in living with them, I soon discovered that their way of life did not have meaning or bring lasting

happiness. Instead, I saw that it was permeated with dishonesty and disloyalty.

MY SEARCH CONTINUES ON A SAILBOAT

In the meantime, a childhood dream started to resurface. I wanted to sail the seas, not as a sailor, but as a captain. The only way I could do that was by having my own sailboat. Since a friend named Tom had similar aspirations, we decided to sail around the world together. I wanted to find a tropical island paradise where I would be away from the Establishment.

Tom and I traveled to Arenys de Mar, near Barcelona, Spain. There we bought a 31-foot (9.4 m) sailboat named Llygra. We began to rebuild the sloop to make her seaworthy. Since we were not in a hurry to reach our destination, we took out the engine and used the space for extra drinking water. In order to maneuver the sailboat in small harbors, we had two 16-foot (5 m) oars fitted. Finally, we set sail for the Seychelles, in the Indian Ocean. Our plan was to sail along the west coast of Africa and around the Cape of Good Hope, South Africa. We navigated with a sextant so that we could plot our course, using stars, star charts, and almanacs. I was amazed at how we could pinpoint our exact position.

Before long, we realized that this old wooden vessel was not seaworthy. It took on water at a rate of about six gallons (22 L) per hour! As mentioned in the introduction, during a storm I became afraid and prayed for the first time in many years, promising God that if we survived, I would try to get to know him. The storm abated and, for once, I kept my promise.

I started to read the Bible while out in nature. Imagine sitting in the middle of the Mediterranean Sea, surrounded by flying fish, dolphins, and endless horizons. At night, I was fascinated by the Milky Way gal-



Together with a friend, I searched for a paradise island

axy and became ever more convinced that there is a God who is interested in mankind.

After some weeks at sea, we rowed into the harbor at Alicante, Spain, where we put our boat up for sale in order to get a better one. Not surprisingly, it was not easy to find a buyer for an old, engineless, leaky sailboat! On the other hand, it was an excellent time to read my Bible.

The more I read the Bible, the more I began to see it as a handbook that can help us succeed in life. I was impressed with the Bible's clear language about living a clean, moral life and wondered why so many people—including myself—consider themselves to be Christians and yet ignore what it says.

I was determined to take major steps to clean up my life, so I stopped using drugs. I thought that there must be people who live by the Bible's high moral standards, and I wanted to meet them. For the second time, I prayed, asking God to help me find them.

MY SEARCH FOR THE TRUE RELIGION

To me, it seemed logical to apply the process of elimination in my search for the true

religion. As I walked through the streets of Alicante, I came across many religious buildings. But because most of them had images, it was easy to scratch them off my list.

One Sunday afternoon, I was on a hillside overlooking the harbor, reading James 2: 1-5, which warns against showing favoritism to the rich. On the way back to our boat, I passed what looked like a religious meeting place with a sign above the entrance: “Kingdom Hall of Jehovah’s Witnesses.”

I thought, ‘I should put these people to the test. Let’s see how they receive me.’ So I entered the Kingdom Hall barefoot, bearded, and wearing torn jeans. The attendant escorted me to a seat next to an elderly lady who kindly helped me find the scriptures mentioned by the speaker. After the meeting, I was overwhelmed by the kindness of all who came to greet me. One man invited me to his home for a discussion, but because I had not finished reading the Bible, I told him, “I will let you know when I am ready.” In the meantime, I began attending all the meetings.

Several weeks later, I visited the man in his home and he answered my Bible ques-

tions. A week later, he gave me a bag full of very nice clothes. He told me that the owner of the clothes was in prison because of obeying the Bible’s command to love one another and not learn war anymore. (Isa. 2:4; John 13:34, 35) Now I was sure that I had found what I was looking for—people who apply the straightforward language of the Bible about morality! My goal was no longer to find a paradise island but to study the Bible in depth. So I returned to the Netherlands.

IN SEARCH OF A JOB

It took me four days of hitchhiking to reach the city of Groningen, in the Netherlands. There I needed to get a job to support myself. At one carpenter shop where I applied for work, the form asked for my religion. I wrote, “Jehovah’s Witnesses.” When the owner read that, I noticed that the expression on his face changed. He said, “I will call you.” But he never did.

At another carpenter shop, I asked the owner if he needed help. He asked for diplomas and letters of reference. I explained that I had done repair work on a wooden



Helping people in East Africa learn Bible truths has given my wife and me much joy



**Ineke and I have experienced
how Jehovah blesses his servants
with a life rich in purpose**

sailboat. To my surprise, he said, “You can start this afternoon but under one condition. I don’t want you to cause any problems in my shop because I’m one of Jehovah’s Witnesses and I live by Bible principles.” I looked at him in amazement and replied, “So am I!” No doubt, because of my long hair and beard, he said, “Then, I will study the Bible with you!” I gladly accepted his offer. Now it was clear to me why the other owner never called back. Jehovah was giving me the requests of my heart. (Ps. 37:4) I worked at that brother’s shop for one year. During that time, he studied the Bible with me, after which I got baptized in January 1974.

AT LAST, I FOUND A LIFE RICH IN PURPOSE!

A month later, I embarked on a new career—pioneer service—which has given

me immense satisfaction. The following month, I moved to Amsterdam to support a newly established Spanish-language group. What a joy to conduct Bible studies in the Spanish and Portuguese languages! In May 1975, I received the privilege of serving as a special pioneer.

One day, a special pioneer sister named Ineke came to our Spanish meeting to introduce her Bolivian Bible student to us. Ineke and I decided to get to know each other by letter writing, which soon revealed that we shared the same goals. We were married in 1976 and continued to serve as special pioneers until 1982 when we were invited to attend the 73rd class of Gilead. How surprised and delighted we were to be assigned to East Africa, where we served for five years in Mombasa, Kenya! In 1987, we were re-assigned to Tanzania, where the ban on the preaching work had been lifted. We stayed there for 26 years before returning to Kenya.

Helping appreciative people learn Bible truth has given our life real meaning. For example, my first Bible student in Mombasa was a man I met while doing public witnessing. After I offered him two magazines, he said, “If I finish these, what do I do then?” The next week we started studying the Bible with the book *You Can Live Forever in Paradise on Earth*, which had just been released in Swahili. He got baptized a year later and became a regular pioneer. Since then, he and his wife have assisted nearly 100 people to dedication and baptism.

When I first came to understand the purpose of life, I felt like the traveling merchant who discovered a special pearl and did not want to let it go. (Matt. 13:45, 46) I wanted to spend my life helping others to find the real meaning of life. Along with my dear wife, I have experienced firsthand how Jehovah blesses his people with a life rich in purpose.

DID YOU KNOW?

What happened to Nineveh after the days of Jonah?

BY THE seventh century B.C.E., Assyria had become the world's largest empire, "stretching from Cyprus in the west to Iran in the east, and at one point it even included Egypt," noted The British Museum Blog. Its capital, Nineveh, was the biggest city in the world. It boasted impressive monuments, spectacular gardens, luxurious palaces, and extensive libraries. Wall inscriptions from ancient Nineveh show that King Ashurbanipal, like other Assyrian kings, called himself "king of the world." At the time, Assyria and Nineveh seemed unconquerable.

Nevertheless, when Assyria had reached its greatest heights, Jehovah's prophet Zephaniah foretold: "[Jehovah] will . . . destroy Assyria, and he will make Nineveh desolate, as dry as a desert." In addition, Jehovah's prophet Nahum foretold: "Plunder silver, plunder gold! . . . The city is empty, desolate, devastated! . . . Everyone who sees you will flee from you and say, 'Nineveh has been devastated!'" (Zeph. 2:13; Nah. 2:9, 10; 3:7) On hearing those prophecies, people may have wondered: 'Could that ever be possible? Could mighty Assyria ever be conquered?' It must have seemed unbelievable.

Even so, the unthinkable happened! By the end of the seventh century B.C.E., Assyria had been conquered by the Babylonians and the Medes. Eventually, Nineveh was abandoned and vanished from memory! "By the Middle Ages," states a publication by The Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York, "the site was abandoned and buried, and Nineveh was remembered principally through the Bible." According to the Biblical Archaeology Society Online Archive, by the early 1800's, "no one even knew wheth-



- A. The mighty Assyrian World Power was the largest empire in the world at that time**
- B. Nineveh was a city with impressive buildings and monuments**
- C. Nineveh became a desolate wasteland!**

er the great Assyrian capital ever really existed." But then in 1845, archaeologist Austen Henry Layard started excavating the site of Nineveh. The ruins discovered on the site testified to Nineveh's past glory.

The accurate fulfillment of the prophecies about Nineveh strengthens our confidence that Bible prophecies regarding the end of today's political powers will also be fulfilled. —Dan. 2:44; Rev. 19:15, 19-21.

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COVER PICTURE:

Ruth clings to Naomi, her mother-in-law, while Orpah returns to Moab. Ruth tells Naomi: “Where you go I will go” (See study article 45, paragraph 13)

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