

THE WATCHTOWER

OCTOBER 1, 2007

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



Choices That Lead to Happiness



THE WATCHTOWER®

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

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A Rich Ruler Makes a Poor Choice

THE rich young ruler was conscientious, law-abiding, and religious. Coming to Jesus, he fell to his knees and asked: "Good Teacher, what must I do to inherit everlasting life?"

In reply, Jesus indicated that to gain life the man had to keep God's commandments. When asked to be specific, Jesus said: "You must not murder, You must not commit adultery, You must not steal, You must not bear false witness, Honor your father and your mother, and, You must love your neighbor as yourself." These were fundamental commandments contained in the Law given to Moses. The man then said: "I have kept all these; what yet am I lacking?"—Matthew 19:16-20.

Jesus "felt love for him" and said: "One thing is missing about you: Go, sell what things you have and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven, and come be my follower."—Mark 10:17-21.

Suddenly thrust upon the young ruler was a weighty decision. What would he do? Would he willingly give up material riches and become a follower of Jesus, or would he hold on to what he had? Would he pursue treasures on earth, or would he seek treasures in heaven? It must have been a difficult choice for him. He was



clearly interested in spiritual values, for he kept the Law and inquired what more he could do to win God's favor. His decision? He "went off grieved, for he was holding many possessions."—Mark 10:22.

The young ruler's decision was not wise. If he had become a faithful follower of Jesus, he could have received what he was searching for—everlasting life. We are not told what happened to that young

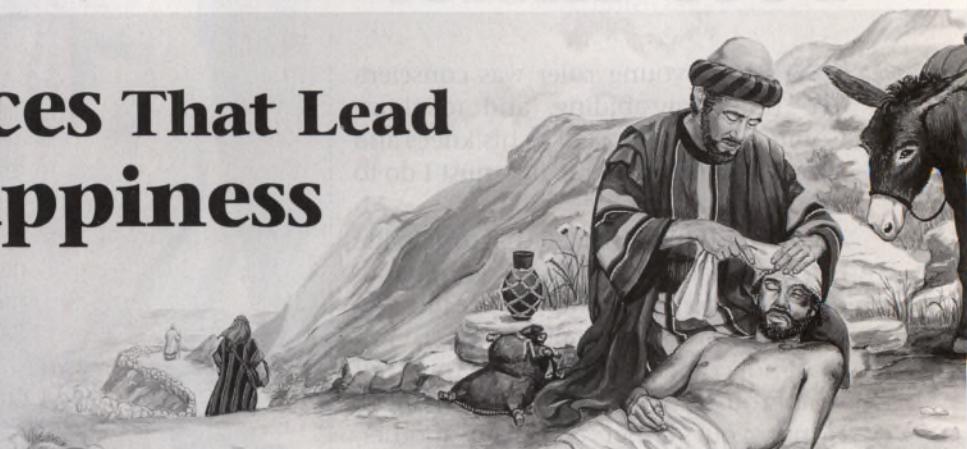
man. We do know, however, that about four decades later, the Roman armies devastated Jerusalem and much of Judea. Many Jews lost both their riches and their lives.

In contrast with the young ruler, the apostle Peter and other disciples made a good choice. They "left all things" and followed Jesus. How that decision benefited them! Jesus told them that they would receive many times more than what they left behind.

Moreover, they would inherit everlasting life. Theirs was a decision that they did not have to regret later.—Matthew 19:27-29.

We all face decisions in life—some small, some great. What did Jesus have to say about such decisions? Will you accept his counsel? By choosing to do so, you will be richly rewarded. Let us now consider how we can follow Jesus and benefit from what he said.

Choices That Lead to Happiness



I WISH I had done things differently!" How many times have you said that to yourself? We all want to make choices that we will not regret, especially when those choices affect the course of our life. How, though, can we make choices that lead to happiness?

To begin with, we need to have standards that are truly reliable. Do such standards exist? Many people do not think so. According to a survey in the United States, 75 percent of college seniors believe that there is no such thing as right and wrong and that concepts of good and evil vary according to "individual values and cultural diversity."

Is it really reasonable to think that moral standards are simply a matter of personal or popular opinion? No, it is not. If people were

free to do whatever they wished, the result would be chaos. Who would want to live in a place where there were no laws, no courts, and no policemen? Besides, personal opinion is not always a reliable guide. We may choose to do something that we believe to be right, only to discover later that we were mistaken. Indeed, the whole of human history testifies to the truth of this Biblical precept: "It does not belong to man who is walking even to direct his step." (Jeremiah 10:23) Where, then, can we turn for guidance when making decisions on the important issues of life?

The young ruler who was mentioned in the preceding article wisely went to Jesus. As we have seen, in answering the young man's question, Jesus referred to God's Law. Jesus

recognized that Jehovah God is the highest Source of knowledge and wisdom and that He knows what is best for His creatures. Consequently, Jesus said: "What I teach is not mine, but belongs to him that sent me." (John 7:16) Truly, God's Word is a reliable source of direction that will help us make wise choices in life. Let us consider a few principles found in God's Word that if applied will contribute to our happiness.

The Golden Rule

In his famous Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught a basic principle that can help us make wise decisions in our relationships with others. This is what he said: "All things, therefore, that you want men to do to you, you also must likewise do to them." (Matthew 7:12) This principle of conduct is often called the Golden Rule.

Some have used a similar expression in a negative form: "Do not do to others what you would not like done to yourselves." To show the difference between the Golden Rule and a negative form of it, consider Jesus' parable of the neighborly Samaritan. A Jew was beaten and left half-dead along the road. A priest and a Levite saw him but passed him by. Because they did nothing to add to the man's misery, it might be said that they acted according to a negative version of the Golden Rule. In contrast, a passing Samaritan stopped to help. He dressed the man's wounds and took him to an inn. He did for the man what he would have wanted done for himself. He applied the Golden Rule—and made the right choice.—Luke 10:30-37.

There are many ways that we can apply this rule of conduct with happy results. Suppose a new family moves into your neighborhood. Why not take the initiative to meet and welcome its members? You might help them get familiar with the area as well as address their questions and needs. By taking the initiative

in showing neighborly consideration, you will promote good relations with your new neighbors. You will also have the satisfaction of knowing that you did what is pleasing to God. Is that not a wise decision?

Choices Based on Love for Others

In addition to the Golden Rule, Jesus gave other direction that will help you make wise choices. When asked what was the greatest commandment in the Mosaic Law, Jesus answered: "'You must love Jehovah your God with your whole heart and with your whole soul and with your whole mind.' This is the greatest and first commandment. The second, like it, is this, 'You must love your neighbor as yourself.' On these two commandments the whole Law hangs, and the Prophets."—Matthew 22:36-40.

The night before his death, Jesus gave his disciples "a new commandment," to love one another. (John 13:34) Why did he describe that command as new? After all, had he not already explained that loving their neighbor was one of the two commandments upon which the whole Law hangs? Under the Mosaic Law, the Israelites were commanded: "You must love your fellow as yourself." (Leviticus 19:18) Jesus, however, now commanded his disciples to do more than that. On that same night, Jesus told his disciples that he was about to give his life for them. Then he told them: "This is my commandment, that you love one another just as I have loved you. No one has love greater than this, that someone should surrender his soul in behalf of his friends." (John 15:12, 13) Yes, this commandment was new in that it required putting other people's interests ahead of one's own.

There are many ways we can show unselfish love, going beyond just caring for our own interests. Suppose, for example, you lived in an apartment and you wanted to

listen to music at a volume that exhilarated you but upset your neighbor. Would you be willing to curtail your enjoyment so that your neighbor could have some peace? In other words, would you put your neighbor's welfare ahead of your own?

Consider another situation. On a cold and snowy winter day in Canada, an elderly man received a visit by two of Jehovah's Witnesses. In the course of conversation, the man mentioned that a heart condition prevented him from clearing away the snow in front of his home. An hour or so later, he heard loud scraping sounds. The two Witnesses had returned to clear the path and steps leading to his front door. "Today I experienced true Christian love at work," he wrote in a letter to the Canada branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses. "It really gave me a lift and changed my generally pessimistic outlook on today's world. It further cemented my already great respect for your worldwide endeavors." Yes, choosing to render help, however small it may seem, can affect others in a positive way. What happiness there is in making such self-sacrificing choices!

Choices Based on Love for God

Another factor we must consider when we make choices is what Jesus described as the greatest commandment—that we love God. Jesus' words were addressed to the Jews, who as a nation were already in a dedicated relationship with Jehovah. Still, individual Israelites had to choose whether they would serve their God with whole-souled and wholehearted love.—Deuteronomy 30:15, 16.

Likewise, the choices you make reflect how you feel about God. For instance, as you grow in appreciation for the practical value of the Bible, you too face a choice. Would you be willing to undertake a systematic study of the Bible, with the objective of becoming a fol-



*Your decision can make a difference
in other people's life*

lower of Jesus? Choosing to do so is sure to bring you happiness, for Jesus said: "Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need."

—Matthew 5:3.

We do not know whether the young ruler regretted his decision. However, we do know how the apostle Peter felt after following Jesus Christ for many years. In about 64 C.E., as the end of his life was approaching, Peter encouraged his fellow believers: "Do your utmost to be found finally by [God] spotless and unblemished and in peace." (2 Peter 1:14; 3:14) Clearly, Peter did not regret the choice he had made over 30 years earlier, and he encouraged others to stick to the choice they had made.

Following Peter's advice means making the choice to accept the responsibilities of being one of Jesus' disciples and to observe God's commandments. (Luke 9:23; 1 John 5:3) This may seem challenging, yet we have Jesus' reassuring promise: "Come to me, all

you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am mild-tempered and lowly in heart, and you will find refreshment for your souls. For my yoke is kindly and my load is light.”—Matthew 11:28-30.

Consider Arthur's experience. At the age of ten, Arthur started to take violin lessons, with a professional career in view. By the time he was 14, he had established himself as a concert violinist. Still, he was not happy. His father always had questions about the meaning of life and invited religion teachers to his home; yet, he was never satisfied with their answers. As a family, they talked about whether God really exists and why he permits evil. Then Arthur's father started a discussion with Jehovah's Witnesses. The conversation struck a responsive chord with Arthur's father, leading to a Bible study for the whole family.

In time, Arthur came to understand from the Scriptures why God permits suffering, and he saw clearly the purpose of life. Together with three other members of his family, Arthur made a choice that he has not regretted. He dedicated his life to Jehovah. “I am so happy that Jehovah has blessed me with a knowledge of the truth and that he rescued me from the rivalry typical among professional musicians. To succeed, people will do anything.”

Arthur still enjoys playing the violin to entertain his friends, but his life does not revolve around it. Instead, his life is centered on his service to God. He has been serving at one of the branch offices of Jehovah's Witnesses. Like Arthur and millions of others, but unlike the rich young ruler, you too can make the choice that will bring you the greatest happiness—that of accepting the invitation from Jesus to be his follower.

Will you study the Bible and become a follower of Jesus?





DISTRESSED SISTERS WHO “Built the House of Israel”

AS DAWN neared, Leah knew that she would soon be found out. Jacob, in whose arms she lay, was about to discover that she was not Rachel, her younger sister. At her father's bidding, Leah, likely heavily veiled, had lain down the night before in the bridal bed made for Jacob and Rachel.

Imagine how Jacob must have felt when the morning light revealed the truth! Indignant, he argued with Laban, Leah's father. Meanwhile, Leah must have pondered her own role in the charade and what its long-term effects might be. The story of Leah and Rachel is an integral part of Bible history. It also offers insight into the wisdom of monogamy and marital fidelity.

A Stranger at the Well

Seven years earlier, Rachel had run to tell her father that she had met a stranger at the well who claimed to be a relative. He turned out to be her cousin Jacob, the son of her father's sister and a worshipper of Jehovah. A month later, Jacob offered to serve Laban for seven years for Rachel's hand in marriage. Seeing how well his nephew worked and knowing that it was customary among their people for relatives to wed, Laban accepted the offer.—Genesis 29:1-19.

Jacob's love for Rachel was no infatuation. Their seven-year engagement “proved to be like some few days because of his love for her.” (Genesis 29:20) That Jacob loved Rachel until she died suggests that she must have had many endearing qualities.

Did Leah too hope to marry a faithful worshipper of Jehovah? The Bible does not say. Laban's ideas about her marriage are clearer in the record. At the end of Rachel's engagement, Laban held a wedding feast. But during the evening, says the Bible account, he brought Leah to Jacob “that he might have relations with her.”—Genesis 29:23.

Did Leah conspire to deceive Jacob? Or was she simply obliged to obey her father? And where was Rachel? Did she know what was going on? If so, how did she feel? Could she defy the will of her authoritarian father? The Bible provides no answer to these questions. Whatever Rachel and Leah thought about the matter, afterward the scheme outraged Jacob. And it was with Laban, not his daughters, that Jacob remonstrated: “Was it not for Rachel that I served with you? So why have you tricked

me?" Laban's response? "It is not customary . . . to give the younger woman before the firstborn. Celebrate to the full the week of this woman. After that there shall be given to you also this other woman for the service that you can serve with me for seven years more." (Genesis 29:25-27) Thus Jacob was maneuvered into a polygamous marriage that was to spawn bitter jealousy.

An Unhappy Family

Jacob loved Rachel. When God saw that in comparison Leah was "hated," he opened her womb, while Rachel remained barren. But Leah wanted more than a child; she wanted Jacob's affection. Seeing that affection go to Rachel, she felt wretched. Still, Leah hoped for Jacob's love on account of her bearing his first son, Reuben, meaning "See, a Son!" Leah had reason for thus naming her child: "It is because Jehovah has looked upon my wretchedness, in that now my husband will begin to love me." But Jacob did not; nor did he on the birth of another son. Leah called that son Simeon, meaning "Hearing." She rea-

soned: "It is because Jehovah has listened, in that I was hated and so he gave me also this one."—Genesis 29:30-33.

That God listened meant that Leah had prayed about her lot. She was seemingly a faithful woman. Yet, her pain persisted even after she bore a third son, Levi. His name, meaning "Adherence," or "Joined," is explained by Leah's words: "Now this time my husband will join himself to me, because I have borne him three sons." Evidently, though, Jacob felt no closer to her. Perhaps Leah resigned herself to that fact, for her fourth son's name contained no reference to her hopes of better relations with Jacob. Instead, the naming of Judah expressed her thankfulness to God. The name "Judah" means "Lauded," or "Object of Laudation." Leah simply said: "This time I shall laud Jehovah."—Genesis 29:34, 35.

If Leah felt wretched, Rachel felt no better. She begged Jacob: "Give me children or otherwise I shall be a dead woman." (Genesis 30:1) Rachel had Jacob's love, but she

Leah and Rachel each desired what the other had, and neither was happy





*From Jacob's
12 sons came
the nation of Israel*

sought motherhood. Leah had children, but she sought love. Each desired what the other had, and neither was happy. Both loved Jacob and wished to bear his children. Each was jealous of the other. What a sad situation for that family!

Children for Rachel?

Back then, infertility was viewed as an affliction. God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their family would produce the "seed" by means of whom all families would bless themselves. (Genesis 26:4; 28:14) Yet, Rachel was childless. Jacob reasoned that only God could give Rachel sons, enabling her to contribute to such blessings. Still, Rachel was impatient. "Here is my slave girl Bilhah," she said. "Have relations with her, that she may give birth upon my knees and that I, even I, may get children from her."—Genesis 30:2, 3.

Rachel's attitude might be hard for us to comprehend. However, ancient marriage contracts discovered throughout the Near East indicate that it was an accepted custom for a barren wife to give her husband a ser-

vant girl in order to produce an heir.* (Genesis 16:1-3) In some cases, the slave girl's children would then be regarded as children of the wife.

When Bilhah had a boy, a delighted Rachel proclaimed: "God has acted as my judge and has also listened to my voice, so that he gave me a son." She called him Dan, meaning "Judge." She too had prayed about her plight. At the birth of Bilhah's second son, Naphtali, meaning "My Wrestlings," Rachel said: "With strenuous wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister. I have also come off winner!" The names point to the strife between the rivals.—Genesis 30:5-8.

Perhaps Rachel thought that she was acting in harmony with her prayers when she gave Bilhah to Jacob, but this was not God's way of giving her children. There is a lesson in this. We should not grow impatient when we petition Jehovah. He can answer

* One such contract from Nuzi, Iraq, reads: "Kelim-ninu has been given in marriage to Shennima. . . . If Kelim-ninu does not bear [children], Kelim-ninu shall acquire a woman [a slave girl] of the land of Lullu as wife for Shennima."

prayers in unexpected ways and when we least expect it.

Not to be outdone, Leah too gave Jacob her maidservant, Zilpah. She produced first Gad, then Asher.—Genesis 30:9-13.

An incident that highlights the rivalry between Rachel and Leah involved some mandrakes found by Leah's son Reuben. This fruit was thought to aid in conception. When Rachel asked for some, Leah responded bitterly: "Is this a little thing, your having taken my husband, with your now taking also my son's mandrakes?" Some understand her words to mean that Jacob was with Rachel more often than with Leah. Perhaps Rachel saw the merit of Leah's grievance, for she answered: "For that reason he is going to lie down with you tonight in exchange for your son's mandrakes." So when Jacob got home that evening, Leah informed him: "It is with me you are going to have relations, because I have hired you outright with my son's mandrakes."—Genesis 30:15, 16.

Leah had a fifth and a sixth son, Issachar and Zebulun. Thereafter, she declared: "At last my husband will tolerate me, because I have borne him six sons."*—Genesis 30:17-20.

The mandrakes did not help. When after six years of marriage Rachel finally did conceive and give birth to Joseph, it was because Jehovah "remembered" her and answered her prayer. Only then could Rachel say: "God has taken away my reproach!"—Genesis 30:22-24.

Death and Heritage

While giving birth to her second son, Benjamin, Rachel died. Jacob truly loved

* Dinah, another of Leah's children, is the only one of Jacob's daughters whose name we know.—Genesis 30:21; 46:7.

Rachel, and her two sons were dear to him. Years later, as his own death neared, he could not help but recall the untimely loss of his beloved Rachel. (Genesis 30:1; 35:16-19; 48:7) As to Leah's death, we know nothing except that Jacob buried her in the cave where he too wanted to be buried.—Genesis 49:29-32.

In old age Jacob admitted that his life—including his domestic affairs—had been distressing. (Genesis 47:9) Doubtless, life had been distressing for Leah and Rachel as well. Their experiences highlight the sad consequences of polygamy and illustrate why Jehovah established that a man should have one wife. (Matthew 19:4-8; 1 Timothy 3:2, 12) Jealousy results when the romantic or sexual interests of a husband or a wife are not limited to one person—his or her spouse. That is one reason why God prohibits fornication and adultery.—1 Corinthians 6:18; Hebrews 13:4.

In any case, God continued—and still continues—to carry out his purpose, using imperfect but faithful men and women. The sisters both had weaknesses, as do we. Through these women, however, Jehovah began to fulfill his promise to Abraham. Rightly it is said that Rachel and Leah "built the house of Israel."—Ruth 4:11.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

Live With Tomorrow in View

"Ships of Kittim" Ply the Seas

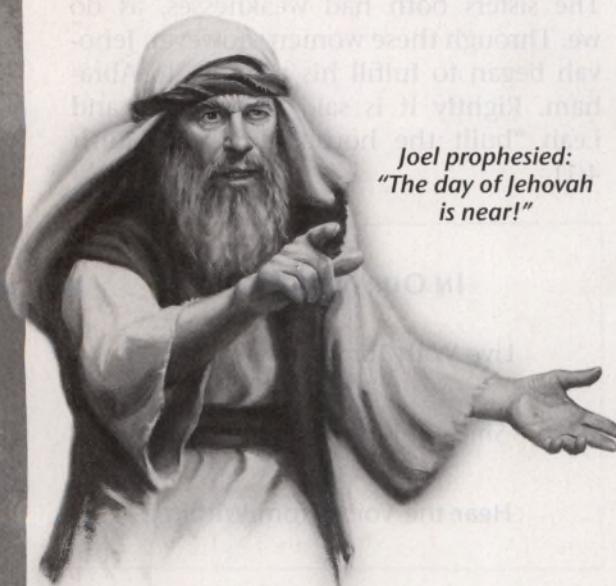
Hear the Voice From Within

Jehovah's Word Is Alive

Highlights From the Books of Joel and Amos

ALL he tells about himself is that he is “Joel the son of Pethuel.” (Joel 1:1) In the book bearing his name, Joel says so little about matters other than his message that even the time of his prophecy can only be estimated—about 820 B.C.E., nine years after Uzziah became king over Judah. Why is Joel so reticent about himself? The likely reason is that he wants to emphasize the message and not the messenger.

Also in the days of Uzziah, Amos, a resident of Judah and “a herdsman and a nipper of figs of sycamore trees,” is commissioned to be a prophet. (Amos 7:14) Unlike Joel, who prophesies in Judah, Amos is sent north to the ten-tribe kingdom of Israel. Completed about 804 B.C.E. after the prophet’s return to Judah, the book of Amos is written in language that is simple but picturesque.



*Joel prophesied:
“The day of Jehovah
is near!”*

“ALAS FOR THE DAY”—WHY?

(Joel 1:1–3:21)

Invasion by the caterpillar, the locust, and the cockroach is what Joel sees in vision. The invaders are referred to as “a people numerous and mighty” and as “powerful men.” (Joel 1:4; 2:2-7) “Alas for the day,” sighs Joel, “because the day of Jehovah is near, and like a despoiling from the Almighty One it will come!” (Joel 1:15) Jehovah counsels the inhabitants of Zion: “Come back to me with all your hearts.” If they do, Jehovah will “show compassion upon his people” and will put far away “the northerner”—the insect assault. Before the coming of his great day, though, Jehovah will “pour out [his] spirit on every sort of flesh” and will “give portents in the heavens and on the earth.”—Joel 2:12, 18-20, 28-31.

The nations are challenged: “Beat your plowshares into swords and your pruning shears into lances” and prepare for war. They are ordered to “come up to the low plain of Jehoshaphat,” where they will be judged and crushed. “But as for Judah, to time indefinite it will be inhabited.”—Joel 3:10, 12, 20.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

1:15; 2:1, 11, 31; 3:14—What is “the day of Jehovah”? The day of Jehovah is the time of the execution of Jehovah’s judgment upon his enemies, resulting in destruction for them but salvation for true worshippers. For example, just such a day came upon ancient Babylon in 539 B.C.E. when it was conquered by the Medes and the Persians. (Isaiah 13:1, 6) Another “day of Jehovah” is near,

when he will execute divine judgment upon "Babylon the Great"—the world empire of false religion.—Revelation 18:1-4, 21.

2:1-10, 28—How has the prophecy about the invasion by insects been fulfilled? There is no record in the Bible of an insect invasion of the land of Canaan of the magnitude described in the book of Joel. Therefore, the assault Joel describes is apparently pictorial of the time in 33 C.E. when Jehovah started to pour out his spirit upon early followers of Christ and they began preaching the message that tormented false religious leaders. (Acts 2:1, 14-21; 5:27-33) It is our privilege to share in a similar work today.

2:32—What does it mean to 'call on the name of Jehovah'? To call on God's name means to know that name, to respect it deeply, and to rely upon and trust in the bearer of that name.—Romans 10:13, 14.

3:14—What is "the low plain of the decision"? It is a symbolic place for meting out God's judgment. In the days of Judean King Jehoshaphat, whose name means "Jehovah Is Judge," God delivered Judah from surrounding nations by confusing their military forces. Hence, the place is also called "the low plain of Jehoshaphat." (Joel 3:2, 12) In our day, it represents a symbolic location in which nations will be crushed like grapes in a winepress.—Revelation 19:15.

Lessons for Us:

1:13, 14. Genuine repentance and acknowledgment of Jehovah as the true God are essential for salvation.

2:12, 13. Genuine repentance is heartfelt. It involves an inward 'ripping apart of our hearts,' not an outward 'ripping apart of garments.'

2:28-32. Only he "who calls on the name of Jehovah will get away safe" on "the great and fear-inspiring day of Jehovah." How grateful we can be that Jehovah pours out

his spirit on every sort of flesh and has young and old, male and female, share in the work of prophesying, that is, declaring "the magnificent things of God"! (Acts 2:11) As the day of Jehovah nears, should we not abound in "holy acts of conduct and deeds of godly devotion"?—2 Peter 3:10-12.

3:4-8, 19. Joel prophesied that the nations surrounding Judah would be called to account for mistreating God's chosen people. True to those prophetic words, the mainland city of Tyre was brought to ruin by Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar. Later, when the island-city fell to Alexander the Great, thousands of its military men and prominent people were killed and 30,000 of its inhabitants were sold into slavery. The Philistines experienced like treatment at the hands of Alexander and his successors. By the fourth century B.C.E., Edom lay desolate. (Malachi 1:3) These fulfilled prophecies strengthen our faith in Jehovah as the Fulfiller of his promises. They also show how Jehovah will deal with nations that persecute his worshippers today.

3:16-21. "Heaven and earth certainly will rock," and the nations will experience Jehovah's adverse judgments. "But Jehovah will be a refuge for his people," granting them life under paradisaic conditions. Should we not be firmly determined to stay close to him as his day for executing judgment upon the wicked world draws near?

"GET READY TO MEET YOUR GOD" **(Amos 1:1-9:15)**

Amos has a message for the enemy nations round about Israel and for Judah and Israel. Destruction is in store for Syria, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, and Moab because of their cruel treatment of God's people. The inhabitants of Judah are in line for destruction "on account of their rejecting the law of Jehovah." (Amos 2:4) What about the ten-tribe

kingdom of Israel? Her sins include greedy oppression of the poor, immorality, and disrespectful treatment of God's prophets. Amos warns that Jehovah will "hold an accounting against the altars of Bethel" and "will strike down the winter house in addition to the summer house."—Amos 3:14, 15.

Despite various punishments already meted out, the idolatrous Israelites remain obstinate. Amos tells them: "Get ready to meet your God." (Amos 4:12) For the Israelites, the day of Jehovah will mean that they will "go into exile beyond Damascus," that is, to Assyria. (Amos 5:27) Amos faces opposition from a priest of Bethel but remains undeterred. "The end has come to my people Israel," Jehovah tells Amos. "I shall no more do any further excusing of them." (Amos 8:2) Neither Sheol nor high mountains can shield them from God's judgments. (Amos 9:2, 3) Yet, there is a promise of restoration. "I will gather back the captive ones of my people Israel," says Jehovah, "and they will actually build the desolated cities and inhabit them, and plant vineyards and drink the wine of them, and make gardens and eat the fruit of them."—Amos 9:14.

Scriptural Questions Answered:

4:1—Who are pictured by the "cows of Bashan"? The high plateau of Bashan, an area east of the Sea of Galilee, was known for its excellent breeds of animals, including cows. The area's rich pastures contributed to this. Amos likened the luxury-loving women of Samaria to the cows of Bashan. These women undoubtedly pressured "their masters," or husbands, to defraud the lowly ones to facilitate their own taste for riches.

4:6—What is meant by the expression "cleanness of teeth"? Used in parallel with "want of bread," the phrase could refer to a time of famine when teeth remain clean because of the lack of food.

5:5—In what way was Israel 'not to search for Bethel'? Jeroboam had set up calf worship in Bethel. Since then, that city had become a center of false worship. Gilgal and Beer-sheba too must have been locations of apostate worship. To escape the foretold calamity, Israel needed to stop making religious pilgrimages to these places and start searching for Jehovah.

7:1—To what does "the mown grass of the king" refer? It likely refers to the tax levied by the king for the upkeep of his horsemen and animals. This tax had to be paid "at the start of the coming up of the later sowing." Afterward, the people could harvest their crops. Before they could do that, however, a locust swarm formed and devoured their crops along with the other vegetation.

8:1, 2—What did "a basket of summer fruit" signify? It signified that the day of Jehovah was near. Summer fruit is picked toward the end of the harvest season, that is, toward the end of the agricultural year. When Jehovah caused Amos to see "a basket of summer fruit," it meant that the end was near for Israel. Therefore, God told Amos: "The end has come to my people Israel. I shall no more do any further excusing of them."

Lessons for Us:

1:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 2:1, 4, 6. It was with regard to his anger toward Israel, Judah, and the six nations surrounding them that Jehovah says: "I shall not turn it back." Jehovah's judgments are inescapable.—Amos 9:2-5.

2:12. We should not discourage hardworking pioneers, traveling overseers, missionaries, or members of the Bethel family by urging them to give up their full-time service for a so-called normal way of life. On the contrary, we should encourage them to keep up their good work.

3:8. As one feels afraid when hearing a lion roar, Amos felt impelled to preach at hearing Jehovah say: “Go, prophesy to my people.” (Amos 7:15) Godly fear should move us to be zealous preachers of the Kingdom message.

3:13-15; 5:11. With Jehovah’s help, the lowly herdsman Amos was able to “give witness” to people who were affluent and therefore complacent. Jehovah can likewise equip us to declare the Kingdom message regardless of how challenging a territory might be.

4:6-11; 5:4, 6, 14. Despite the Israelites’ repeated failure to “come back” to Jehovah, they were urged to “search for Jehovah, and keep living.” As long as Jehovah patiently allows this wicked system of things to continue, we should exhort those in it to turn to God.

5:18, 19. “Craving the day of Jehovah” without really being ready for it is foolish. The situation of a man doing so is like that of someone who flees from a lion only to encounter a bear and then runs away from the bear only to be bitten by a serpent. We would be wise to “keep awake” spiritually and to remain in a state of readiness.—Luke 21:36.

7:12-17. We should be fearless and bold about declaring God’s message.

9:7-10. Being descendants of faithful patriarchs and of those delivered out of Egypt as

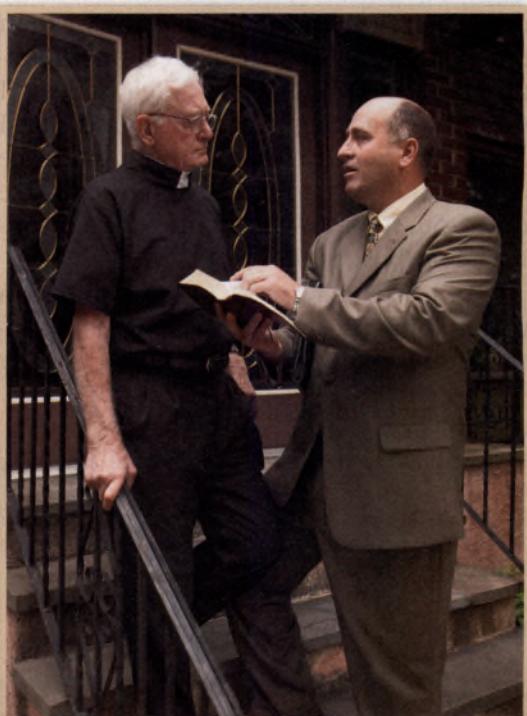
Like Amos, we should be fearless and bold proclaimers of God’s message

God’s chosen people did not prevent the unfaithful Israelites from having a bad standing with God like that of the Cushites. Gaining an approved standing with the impartial God depends, not on having a certain lineage, but on ‘fearing him and working righteousness.’—Acts 10:34, 35.

What We Should Do

The day for executing divine judgment upon Satan’s world is near. God has poured out his spirit upon his worshippers, equipping them to warn mankind of the coming of his day. Should we not have a full share in helping others come to know Jehovah and ‘call on his name’?—Joel 2:31, 32.

“Hate what is bad,” exhorts Amos, “and love what is good, and give justice a place in the gate.” (Amos 5:15) As Jehovah’s day nears, it is the course of wisdom to draw close to God and keep ourselves separate from the wicked world and its corrupting associations. To that end, what timely lessons we can learn from the Bible books of Joel and Amos!—Hebrews 4:12.





PURSUING A MEANINGFUL PURPOSE IN LIFE

"Every breathing thing—let it praise Jah."—PSALM 150:6.

I STUDIED medicine because I wanted to use my life to help people. I also felt that the prestige and financial rewards of being a doctor would make me happy," recalls Seung Jin, who grew up in Korea.* "As I came to realize how little a doctor can really do to help, I became disillusioned. I then pursued art, but my artistic creations did little good for others, and I felt selfish. I turned to teaching and soon found that I could only pass on facts but not guidance that could lead to real happiness." Like many, Seung Jin was searching for a meaningful purpose in life.

To have true purpose in life is to have a reason for living, a clear objective, and a focal point for our efforts. Can humans really

* Some names have been changed.

1. Describe one young man's search for a purpose in life.

2. (a) What does it mean to have purpose in life? (b) How do we know that the Creator had a purpose in putting us here?

have such a purpose? Yes! The fact that we are endowed with intelligence, conscience, and the ability to reason implies that the Creator had a good purpose in putting us here. Logically, therefore, we can find and fulfill our true purpose only by living in harmony with the Creator's purpose.

³ The Bible reveals that God's purpose for us involves many things. For example, the wonderful way in which we are made is truly an expression of unselfish love on God's part. (Psalm 40:5; 139:14) Thus, living according to God's purpose means loving others unselfishly as God does. (1 John 4:7-11) It also means observing God's instructions, which help us to live in harmony with his loving purpose.—Ecclesiastes 12:13; 1 John 5:3.

⁴ God also purposed that humans live happily and peacefully with one another

3. What does God's purpose for humans involve?
4. (a) What is needed to have real purpose in life? (b) What is the highest purpose anyone can pursue?

and with the rest of creation. (Genesis 1:26; 2:15) What, though, do we need to do to feel happy, secure, and at peace? Like a child who needs to sense the presence of his parents to feel happy and secure, we need a good relationship with our heavenly Father to find real meaning and purpose in life. (Hebrews 12:9) God makes such a relationship with him possible by allowing us to draw close to him and by hearing our prayers. (James 4:8; 1 John 5:14, 15) If we 'walk with God' in faith and become his friends, we can bring joy and praise to our heavenly Father. (Genesis 6:9; Proverbs 23:15, 16; James 2:23) That is the highest purpose anyone can pursue. The psalmist wrote: "Every breathing thing—let it praise Jah."—Psalm 150:6.

What Is Your Purpose in Life?

⁵ Part of God's purpose for us is that we take good care of ourselves and of our families. This includes caring for both physical and spiritual needs. Balance is needed in doing this, however, so that secular interests and concerns do not eclipse the more important spiritual ones. (Matthew 4:4; 6:33) Regrettably, many people focus their life almost exclusively on the acquiring of material things. Yet, trying to satisfy all our needs solely with material things is unrealistic. A recent survey of millionaires in Asia reveals that many of them "feel insecure and troubled, even as they enjoy the social status and the sense of accomplishment their wealth brings."—Ecclesiastes 5:11.

⁶ Jesus spoke of "the deceptive power of riches." (Mark 4:19) How are riches deceptive? They appear to make one happy, but they do not. "The man who loves mon-

5. Why is putting material interests first unrealistic?
6. What counsel did Jesus give on the pursuit of riches?

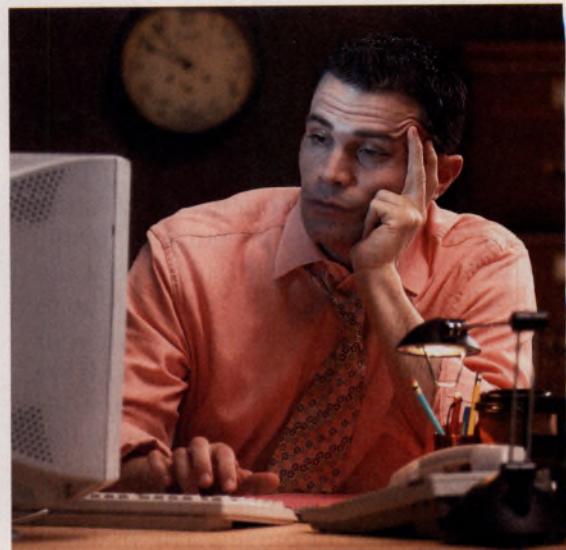
ey can never have enough," noted wise King Solomon. (Ecclesiastes 5:10, *The New English Bible*) But is it possible to pursue materialistic goals and still serve God whole-souled? No, it is not. Jesus explained: "No one can slave for two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will stick to the one and despise the other. You cannot slave for God and for Riches." Jesus urged his followers to store up, not material goods on earth, but "treasures in heaven," that is, to establish a good name with God, who "knows what things you are needing before ever you ask him."—Matthew 6:8, 19-25.

⁷ In writing to his fellow worker Timothy, the apostle Paul gave some strong counsel in this regard. He told Timothy: "Give orders to those who are rich . . . to rest their hope, not on uncertain riches, but on God, who furnishes us all things richly for our enjoyment . . . , to be liberal, ready to share, safely treasuring up for themselves a fine foundation for the future, in order that they may get a firm hold on the real life."—1 Timothy 6:17-19.

What Is "the Real Life"?

⁸ To most people, the expression "the real life" conjures up an image of luxury and pleasure. One Asian news magazine notes: "Those who watch films or TV learn to desire what they see, to dream of what they might have." Many people make the attaining of riches and status their purpose in life. Many sacrifice their youth, health, family life, and spiritual values in pursuit of these things. Few stop to think that such media images are no more than a reflection of "the spirit of the world"—the dominant pattern

7. How may we "get a firm hold on the real life"?
8. (a) Why do many strive for riches and status?
(b) What do such ones fail to perceive?



Christians need to make the right sacrifices

of thinking that influences the majority of earth's billions and moves them to act in opposition to God's purpose for us. (1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2) No wonder there are so many unhappy people today! —Proverbs 18:11; 23:4, 5.

⁹ What about those who selflessly labor for the well-being of others, striving to eradicate hunger, illness, and injustice? Their noble and self-sacrificing efforts often do much good. Yet, despite their best efforts, they will never change this system of things into a fair and good one. Why not? Because in reality "the whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one"—Satan—and he does not want it to change.—1 John 5:19.

¹⁰ How sad if one entertains no hope beyond life in this present world! "If in this life only we have hoped in Christ, we are of all men most to be pitied," wrote Paul. "Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we are to

9. What can humans never accomplish, and why not?
10. When will faithful ones enjoy "the real life"?

die" is the attitude of those who believe that this life is all there is. (1 Corinthians 15:19, 32) But there is a future, a "new heavens and a new earth that we are awaiting according to [God's] promise, and in these righteousness is to dwell." (2 Peter 3:13) At that time, Christians can enjoy "the real life," that is, "everlasting life" in perfection, either in heaven or under the loving rulership of God's Kingdom government! —1 Timothy 6:12.

¹¹ Only God's Kingdom will have complete success in solving mankind's problems. Working to advance the interests of God's Kingdom is thus the most purposeful endeavor anyone can pursue. (John 4:34) While we engage in that work, we enjoy a blessed relationship with our heavenly Father. We also have the joy of serving alongside millions of spiritual brothers and sisters, who pursue the same purpose in life.

11. Why is working to advance the interests of God's Kingdom purposeful?

Making the Right Sacrifices

¹² The present world "is passing away and so is its desire," says the Bible. No part of Satan's world, including its fame and fortune, will be exempt, "but he that does the will of God remains forever." (1 John 2:15-17) In contrast with the uncertain riches, the fleeting glory, and the shallow pleasures of the present system, "the real life"—everlasting life under God's Kingdom—is permanent and worthy of our sacrifices, provided we make the right sacrifices.

¹³ Consider Henry and Suzanne. They have full faith in God's promise that all who put the Kingdom first in their life will receive God's help. (Matthew 6:33) Thus, they chose to live in an inexpensive home so that instead of both working secularly, they could spend more time in spiritual pursuits with their two daughters. (Hebrews 13:15, 16) One well-meaning friend could not understand their choice. She told Suzanne: "Honey, if you ever want to live in a nicer place, you'll just have to sacrifice something." Henry and Suzanne, though, knew that putting Jehovah first "holds promise of the life now and that which is to come." (1 Timothy 4:8; Titus 2:12) Their daughters grew up to be zealous full-time evangelizers. As a family, they feel that they missed out on nothing; rather, they benefited a great deal by making the pursuit of "the real life" their purpose. —Philippians 3:8; 1 Timothy 6:6-8.

Do Not 'Use the World to the Full'

¹⁴ There is real danger, however, if we lose sight of our true purpose and loosen our hold on "the real life." We risk "being car-

12. Contrast life in the present system with "the real life."

13. How did one couple make the right sacrifices?

14. Losing sight of our true purpose can lead to what tragedies?

ried away by anxieties and riches and pleasures of this life." (Luke 8:14) Uncontrolled desires and "anxieties over livelihood" can lead to excessive involvement in this system of things. (Luke 21:34, footnote) Tragically, some have become caught up in today's frenzied economy and have been "led astray from the faith and have stabbed themselves all over with many pains," even losing their precious relationship with Jehovah. What a price to pay for not keeping "a firm hold on the everlasting life"! —1 Timothy 6:9, 10, 12; Proverbs 28:20.

¹⁵ Paul advised "those making use of the world [to be] as those not using it to the full." (1 Corinthians 7:31) Keith and Bonnie took this to heart. "I became one of Jehovah's Witnesses just as I was completing dental school," Keith relates. "I had a choice. I could take on many patients and make a lot of money, but doing so would cut into our spiritual life. I chose to limit my practice so as to have more time for the spiritual and emotional well-being of our family, which came to include five daughters. Though we rarely had extra funds, we learned to economize, and we always had what we needed. Family life was close, warm, and full of joy. Eventually, all of us entered the full-time ministry. Now our daughters are happily married, three of them with children of their own. Their families too are happy as they continue to put Jehovah's purpose first."

Putting God's Purpose First in Your Life

¹⁶ The Bible presents examples of those who lived for God's purpose and those

15. How did one family benefit from 'not using the world to the full'?

16, 17. What examples of talented people does the Bible present, and how are they remembered?

who did not. The lessons from such examples apply to people of all ages, cultures, and circumstances. (Romans 15:4; 1 Corinthians 10:6, 11) Nimrod built great cities, but he did so in opposition to Jehovah. (Genesis 10:8, 9) Many others, though, were good examples. Moses, for instance, did not make the keeping of his status as an Egyptian nobleman his purpose in life. Rather, he esteemed his spiritual privileges “as riches greater than the treasures of Egypt.” (Hebrews 11:26) The physician Luke likely helped Paul and others to deal with their maladies. But Luke made his greatest contribution as an evangelizer and a Bible writer. For his part, Paul is known, not as a Law expert, but as a missionary, “an apostle to the nations.”—Romans 11:13.

¹⁷ David is primarily remembered, neither as a military commander nor as a musician and composer, but as “a man agreeable to [God’s] heart.” (1 Samuel 13:14) We know Daniel, not for his work as a Babylonian government official, but for his service as Jehovah’s loyal prophet; Esther, not as queen of Persia, but as an example of courage and faith; Peter, Andrew, James, and John, not as successful fishermen, but as apostles of Jesus. And ultimately, Jesus

himself is to us, not “the carpenter,” but “the Christ.” (Mark 6:3; Matthew 16:16) All of these understood well that whatever talents, assets, or status they enjoyed, their life must revolve, not around their secular careers, but around their service to God. They knew that the noblest and most rewarding purpose that they could have was to be a man or a woman of God.

¹⁸ Seung Jin, mentioned at the outset, came to understand this too. “Instead of devoting all my energies to medicine, art, or secular teaching, I resolved to use my life in line with my dedication to God,” he explains. “I am now serving where there is a great need for Bible teachers, helping people to get on the path to everlasting life. I used to think that being a full-time minister would not be challenging enough. Now my life is more challenging than ever, as I try to improve my personality and my ability to work with people of different cultures. I see that making Jehovah’s purpose our purpose is the only meaningful way of life.”

¹⁹ As Christians, we have been blessed with lifesaving knowledge and the hope of salvation. (John 17:3) Let us, then, not “accept the undeserved kindness of God and miss its purpose.” (2 Corinthians 6:1) Rather, let us use our precious days and years of life to praise Jehovah. Let us spread the knowledge that brings real happiness now and leads to everlasting life. In so doing, we will experience the truth of Jesus’ words: “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.” (Acts 20:35) And we will have found true purpose in life.

Can You Explain?

- What is the highest purpose we can have in life?
- Why is living for material things unrealistic?
- What is “the real life” that God promises?
- How can we use our life for God’s purpose?

-
18. How did one young Christian decide to use his life, and what did he come to realize?
 19. How can we find true purpose in life?

PURSUING GOD'S PURPOSE TODAY

"[Christ] died for all that those who live might live no longer for themselves."

—2 CORINTHIANS 5:15.

"**O**URS was the first civilian vehicle to enter the remote African village after civil war had ended," recalled a missionary named Aaron.* "Communication with the little congregation there had been cut off, and we had to see to the needs of the brothers. In addition to food, clothing, and Bible literature, we brought a copy of the video *Jehovah's Witnesses—The Organization Behind the Name*.[#] So many interested people flocked to see it at the village 'theater'—a large grass hut with a VCR and a TV—that we had to show it twice. Many Bible studies resulted from each showing. Clearly, all our efforts were worthwhile."

Why did Aaron and his companions undertake such a strenuous mission? Because, in gratitude for Jesus Christ's ransom sacrifice, they have dedicated their life to God and they want to use it in harmony with God's purpose. Like them, all dedicated Christians have resolved to "live no longer for themselves" but to do all they can "for the sake of the good news." (2 Corinthians 5:15; 1 Corinthians 9:23) They know that when time runs out for this system of things, all the money and prestige in the world will be of no value. So having life and

* Some names have been changed.

Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

1. Recount an experience one missionary had in his assignment.

2. (a) Why do Christians resolve to use their life in God's service? (b) What questions will we now consider?

a measure of health, they want to use these assets in harmony with God's purpose. (Ecclesiastes 12:1) How can we do this? Where can we find the needed courage and strength to do so? And what avenues of service are open to us?

Taking Progressive, Practical Steps

For true Christians, doing God's will is a lifelong endeavor. It usually begins with such basic steps as enrolling in the Theocratic Ministry School, reading the Bible daily, sharing in the preaching work, and advancing to baptism. As progress is made, we bear in mind the apostle Paul's words: "Ponder over these things; be absorbed in them, that your advancement may be manifest to all persons." (1 Timothy 4:15) Such advancement is not self-promotion but a reflection of our determination to do God's will unselfishly. Taking such a course shows that we allow God to guide our steps in all matters of life, and he does so infinitely better than we could ever do.—Psalm 32:8.

Hesitation or too much self-concern, however, can be an impediment to our making progress in our service to God. (Ecclesiastes 11:4) Thus, before we can find true joy in serving God and others, we may first have to overcome our own fears. Erik, for example, was contemplating serving in a foreign-language congregation. But

3. What basic steps are involved in doing God's will?

4. How can we put needless fears aside?

he worried: ‘Will I fit in? Will I like the brothers? Will they like me?’ He relates: ‘I finally realized that I needed to be more concerned about the brothers than about myself. I resolved to stop worrying and just to give unselfishly in whatever way I could. I prayed for help and went ahead. Now, I enjoy my service there immensely.’ (Romans 4:20) Yes, to the extent that we serve God and others unselfishly, we will find joy and contentment.

⁵ To pursue God’s purpose successfully also requires that we carefully plan our steps. We wisely avoid piling up debts that can enslave us to this system and limit our freedom to do God’s work. The Bible reminds us: “The borrower is servant to the man doing the lending.” (Proverbs 22:7) Trusting in Jehovah and putting spiritual things first help us to keep matters in focus. For instance, Guoming and his two sisters live with their mother in an area where housing costs are high and steady employment can be hard to find. By making careful use of funds and by sharing expenses, they get along even when not all of them are employed. “At times, we do not all have income,” says Guoming. “Still, we can continue in the pioneer ministry and also take good care of our mother. We are grateful that Mom does not want us to forgo spiritual pursuits in order to provide her with life’s luxuries.”—2 Corinthians 12:14; Hebrews 13:5.

⁶ If you are deeply involved in secular pursuits—financial or otherwise—putting God’s purpose first may require major adjustments. Such changes cannot usually be made overnight, and stumbling during

5. Why is careful planning needed in our pursuit of God’s purpose? Illustrate.

6. What example shows how we can bring our life in line with God’s purpose?

your first attempts should not be regarded as a failure. Consider Koichi, who had a problem spending excessive time in recreation. Koichi had studied the Bible as a teenager, but for many years, video games dominated his life. One day Koichi said to himself: ‘What are you doing? You’re in your 30’s, and you’re not doing anything purposeful with your life!’ Koichi resumed his study of the Bible and accepted help from the congregation. Though change came gradually, he did not give up. With much prayer and with loving support from others, he finally broke free from his obsession. (Luke 11:9) Koichi now happily serves as a ministerial servant.

Learn to Be Balanced

⁷ Pursuing God’s purpose merits our whole-souled effort. We should never be self-sparing or lazy in doing so. (Hebrews 6:11, 12) Still, Jehovah does not want us to drive ourselves to exhaustion—physically, mentally, or emotionally. Modestly acknowledging that we cannot accomplish God’s work in our own strength glorifies him and also shows balance on our part. (1 Peter 4:11) Jehovah promises to give us the necessary strength to do his will, but we must not push ourselves beyond our limits, trying to do things he does not expect of us. (2 Corinthians 4:7) To keep on serving God without wearing ourselves out, we need to budget our energies.

⁸ For instance, for two years Ji Hye, who lives in East Asia, worked at a high-pressure job while pioneering. “I tried to give my best both to Jehovah and to the world,” she relates, “but I was sleeping only five

7. Why do we need to be balanced in doing God’s work?

8. What happened when one young Christian tried to give her best both to the world and to Jehovah, and what adjustment did she make?

hours a night. Eventually, I had no mental energy left for the truth, and I found little joy in spiritual things." In order to serve Jehovah with her 'whole heart, soul, mind, and strength,' Ji Hye searched for less-demanding employment. (Mark 12:30) "Despite pressure from my family to seek financial success, I endeavored to put God's purpose first," she says. "I still earn enough money for basics, such as presentable clothing. And it feels good to get more sleep! I find joy in my ministry, and I am spiritually stronger now. That is because I'm not so exposed to the attractions and distractions of the world."—Ecclesiastes 4:6; Matthew 6:24, 28-30.

⁹ Not everyone can serve God as a full-time evangelizer. If you must contend with old age, poor health, or other limitations, know that Jehovah warmly appreciates your faithfulness and whatever whole-hearted service you can offer. (Luke 21: 2, 3) None of us, for that matter, should underestimate

9. How may our efforts affect people in the field?

the effect that our efforts, even if limited, can have on others. For example, suppose that we called on a few homes and found no one who seemed interested in our message. After we leave, the householders might talk about our call for hours or days, even where no one opened the door to us! We do not expect that everyone who hears the good news will respond favorably, but some will. (Matthew 13:19-23) Others may respond later when conditions in the world or in their life change. In any case, by doing what we can in the public ministry, we are doing God's work. We are "God's fellow workers."—1 Corinthians 3:9.

¹⁰ In addition, all of us can help our family members and our spiritual brothers and sisters. (Galatians 6:10) Our good influence on others can be profound and long lasting. (Ecclesiastes 11:1, 6) When elders and ministerial servants carry out their duties diligently, they contribute to the spiritual health and stability of the congregation, and Christian activity increases. We are

10. What opportunities are open to all in the congregation?

Balance is needed for us to keep on serving Jehovah whole-souled





Sacred service takes many forms



assured that when we have “plenty to do in the work of the Lord,” our labor “is not in vain.”—1 Corinthians 15:58.

Pursuing God’s Purpose as a Career

¹¹ As Christians, we enjoy life, and we wish to glorify God in everything we do. (1 Corinthians 10:31) When we faithfully apply ourselves to preaching the Kingdom good news and teaching others to observe all the things that Jesus commanded, we will find many rewarding avenues of service open to us. (Matthew 24:14; 28:19, 20) Besides working with the local congregation, we may have opportunities to serve where there is a greater need, whether in another territory, language, or country. Qualified elders and ministerial servants who are not yet married may be invited to attend the Ministerial Training School, thereafter to serve in congregations where there is a need for the help of mature Christians, either in their home countries or abroad. Married couples who are in the full-time ministry may qualify to receive Gilead missionary training and to

11. Besides working with the local congregation, we may have what other opportunities?

serve in a foreign assignment. And there is an ongoing need for volunteers to do a variety of tasks at Bethel and in building and maintaining meeting places and branch offices.

¹² Which avenues of service should you pursue? As a dedicated servant of Jehovah, always look to him and to his organization for direction. His “good spirit” will help you make the right decision. (Nehemiah 9:20) One assignment often leads to another, and the experience and skills acquired in one form of service may be useful in another assignment later.

¹³ For instance, Dennis and his wife, Jenny, regularly support Kingdom Hall building projects. After Hurricane Katrina hit the southern United States, they volunteered for relief work. Dennis reports: “Using the skills that we developed in building Kingdom Halls to help our brothers has brought us great joy. The appreciation shown by those whom we have helped is truly touching. Most other relief groups have had limit-

12, 13. (a) How can you decide which avenues of service to pursue? (b) Illustrate how the experience gained in one assignment can be useful in others.

ed success in rebuilding. Jehovah's Witnesses have already repaired or rebuilt more than 5,300 homes and numerous Kingdom Halls. People observe this and now show greater interest in our message."

¹⁴ Can you pursue God's purpose by choosing the full-time ministry as your career? If so, you are sure to receive many blessings. If your present circumstances do not permit it, perhaps an adjustment can be made. Pray as did Nehemiah when he longed to take up an important assignment: "Ah, Jehovah, please, . . . do grant success to your servant." (Nehemiah 1:11) Then, trusting in the "Hearer of prayer," follow up your request with action. (Psalm 65:2) For Jehovah to bless your efforts to serve him more fully, you first have to make those efforts. Once you have decided to take up the full-time ministry, stick with your decision. As time passes, your experience will grow, and your joy will increase.

A Life Truly Worthwhile

¹⁵ What results can you expect from pursuing God's purpose? Speak with longtime servants of Jehovah, especially those who have spent many years in the full-time ministry. What rich, purposeful lives they live! (Proverbs 10:22) They will tell you that Jehovah has never failed to help them to obtain even in difficult circumstances what they really need and much more. (Philippians 4:11-13) From 1955 to 1961, *The Watchtower* published a series of life stories of faithful ones under the heading "Pursuing My Purpose in Life." Since then, hundreds of other life stories have been published. Each account projects a spirit of zeal and joy that re-

14. What can you do if you desire to pursue the full-time ministry?

15. (a) How do we benefit by talking to and reading about longtime servants of God? (b) Cite a life story that you have found particularly encouraging.

minds us of that found in the Bible book of Acts. Reading such stirring accounts will move you to say, 'That is the kind of life I want to live!'

¹⁶ Aaron, mentioned at the outset, recalls: "In Africa, I often met young people who were drifting across the country in search of a purpose in life. Most never found one. But here we were, pursuing God's purpose by promoting the good news of the Kingdom, and we enjoyed a challenging and meaningful life. We have experienced firsthand that there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving."—Acts 20:35.

¹⁷ What about you? What purpose are you pursuing? If you do not have a clear spiritual objective, other pursuits will rush in to fill the vacuum. Why squander your precious life on the fantasy world of Satan's system? Not far in the future when the "great tribulation" strikes, material riches and worldly positions will be worthless. What will matter is our relationship with Jehovah. How grateful we will be that we have served God and others and have fully pursued God's purpose in our life!—Matthew 24:21; Revelation 7:14, 15.

16. What makes a Christian's life purposeful and happy?

17. Why must we be pursuing God's purpose now?

Can You Explain?

- How does Jehovah feel about our service to him?
- How does being practical and balanced help us to serve God and others?
- What opportunities to serve are open to us?
- How can we lead a truly purposeful life now?

DELIVERANCE FROM THE TRAPS OF THE BIRDCATCHER

"[Jehovah] himself will deliver you from the trap of the birdcatcher."—PSALM 91:3.

ALL true Christians face a predator, one with superhuman intelligence and craftiness. He is referred to at Psalm 91:3 as "the birdcatcher." Who is this enemy? Since the issue of June 1, 1883, this magazine has identified him as none other than Satan the Devil. This formidable foe cunningly endeavors to mislead and trap Jehovah's people as a birdcatcher tries to trap a bird.

² In ancient times, birds were captured for their beautiful singing, for their colorful plumage, as well as for food and for sacrifice. However, birds are naturally cautious, skittish creatures, difficult to trap. Therefore, a birdcatcher in Bible times first carefully studied the peculiarities and habits of the type of birds he wished to ensnare. Then, he devised cunning methods to trap them. In likening Satan to a birdcatcher, the Bible helps us understand his methods. The Devil studies us as individuals. He notes our habits and characteristics and sets hidden traps in an attempt to catch us alive. (2 Timothy 2:26) Being caught by him would mean our spiritual ruin and could lead to our ultimate destruction. Hence, for our protection, we need to identify various schemes of "the birdcatcher."

³ Using vivid imagery, the psalmist also likens Satan's tactics to those of a young lion or those of a cobra. (Psalm 91:13) Like a lion,

Satan at times makes open, frontal attacks by means of persecution or legislative action against Jehovah's people. (Psalm 94:20) Such lionlike attacks may cause a few to stumble. More often than not, however, these overt attacks backfire and result in a unifying of God's people. What, though, of Satan's more subtle, cobralike attacks?

⁴ The Devil uses his superhuman intelligence to launch treacherous and deadly strikes like those of a poisonous snake from a hidden place. In this way, he has succeeded in poisoning the mind of some of God's people, deceiving them into doing his will rather than Jehovah's, with a tragic outcome. Happily, we are not ignorant of Satan's designs. (2 Corinthians 2:11) Let us now consider four of the deadly traps that are used by "the birdcatcher."

Fear of Man

⁵ "The birdcatcher" understands the normal human desire for acceptance and the approval of others. Christians are not callously indifferent to the thoughts and feelings of those around them. Knowing this, the Devil would like to exploit their concern for what people think of them. For example, he throws some of God's people off balance by using the snare of "trembling at men." (Proverbs 29:25) If because of fear of man, servants of God join others in doing what Jehovah forbids or refrain from doing what God's Word commands them to do, they

1. Who is "the birdcatcher," and why is he dangerous?

2. Why is Satan likened to a birdcatcher?

3, 4. When do Satan's tactics resemble those of a lion? a cobra?

5. Why is the snare of "trembling at men" so effective?

have been ensnared by "the birdcatcher."
—Ezekiel 33:8; James 4:17.

⁶ For example, a young person may cave in to pressure from schoolmates and smoke a cigarette. Smoking a cigarette may have been the farthest thing from his mind when he left for school that day. Soon, though, he is doing something that is both harmful to his health and displeasing to God. (2 Corinthians 7:1) How was he enticed? Perhaps he got involved with the wrong sort of peers and was afraid to incur their disapproval. Young people, do not let "the birdcatcher" lure and trap you! To avoid being caught alive, guard against even small compromises. Heed the Bible's warning to shun bad association.—1 Corinthians 15:33.

⁷ Conscientious Christian parents take seriously their Scriptural responsibility to provide materially for their families. (1 Timothy 5:8) However, Satan's aim is to make Christians lose their balance in this regard. Perhaps they habitually miss meetings because they give in to pressure from their employers to do extra work. They may be afraid to ask for time off to attend all the sessions of a district convention to worship Jehovah with their brothers. The protection against this snare is to "trust in Jehovah." (Proverbs 3:5, 6) Additionally, remembering that we are all members of Jehovah's household and that he has obligated himself to watch over us will help us to maintain our balance. Parents, do you have faith that Jehovah will in one way or another care for you and your family when you do his will? Or will the Devil catch you alive and get you to do his will because of fear of man? We entreat you to consider these questions prayerfully.

6. What example illustrates how a young person may be trapped by "the birdcatcher"?

7. How might Satan cause some parents to lose their spiritual balance?



*Some have been ensnared
by "trembling at men"*

The Snare of Materialism

⁸ Satan also uses the lure of materialism to entrap us. The commercial system of this world often promotes get-rich-quick schemes that may even beguile some of God's people. At times, individuals may be urged: "Work hard. When you reach a comfortable position, you can take it easy and enjoy life. You can even pioneer." Such words may be the unbalanced reasoning of some who take financial advantage of their associates in the Christian congregation. Think carefully about that incentive. Does it not mirror the thinking of the "unreasonable" rich man of Jesus' parable?—Luke 12:16-21.

⁹ Satan operates his wicked system in such a way that it induces people to desire *things*. That desire can eventually make inroads into a Christian's life, choking the word and making it "unfruitful." (Mark 4:19) The Bible

8. In what way does Satan use the lure of materialism?

9. Why might some Christians be ensnared by desiring things?



Are you entertained by what Jehovah hates?

encourages us to be content with sustenance and covering. (1 Timothy 6:8) However, many get ensnared by "the birdcatcher" because they do not apply that counsel to themselves. Could it be that pride makes them feel that they must adhere to a certain lifestyle? What about us personally? Does our desire to possess things cause us to push the interests of true worship into second place? (Haggai 1:2-8) Sadly, during hard economic times, some have sacrificed their spirituality in order to maintain the standard of living to which they had grown accustomed. Such a materialistic attitude delights "the birdcatcher"!

The Trap of Unwholesome Entertainment

¹⁰ Another tactic of "the birdcatcher" is to undermine people's natural sense of what is good and what is bad. A mentality similar to

10. What self-examination should each Christian make?

that found in Sodom and Gomorrah has come to control much of the entertainment industry. Even news reports on television and in periodicals highlight violence and pander to a lurid interest in sex. Much of what appears as entertainment in the media blurs people's ability "to distinguish both right and wrong." (Hebrews 5:14) Recall, however, Jehovah's words through the prophet Isaiah: "Woe to those who are saying that good is bad and bad is good!" (Isaiah 5:20) Has "the birdcatcher" insidiously affected your thinking with such unwholesome entertainment? Self-examination is essential.

—2 Corinthians 13:5.

¹¹ Nearly a quarter of a century ago, *The Watchtower* lovingly warned the household of faith about TV serials.* This observation was made about the subtle impact of popular soap operas: "The search for love is used to justify any conduct. For instance, one unwed pregnant youth says to a friend: 'But I love Victor. I don't care.... To have his baby is worth everything to me!' The soft background music makes it hard to consider her course to be so bad. You too like Victor. You feel sympathy for the girl. You 'understand.' 'It is amazing how you can rationalize,' stated one viewer who later came to her senses. 'We know that immorality is bad.... But I realized that *mentally* I was taking part.'"

¹² Since those articles were published, this type of heart-corrupting programming has become increasingly available. In many places, such programs are broadcast 24 hours

* *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1982, pages 3-7.

11. What warning about TV soap operas was given in this magazine?

12. What facts indicate the current appropriateness of the warning about certain TV programming?

a day. Men, women, and many teenagers frequently feed their minds and hearts on such entertainment. We, though, must not deceive ourselves with false reasoning. It would be wrong to reason that depraved entertainment is no worse than what is seen in the real world. Can a Christian really justify *choosing* to be entertained by the sort of people he would never dream of inviting into his home?

¹³ Many benefited when they took to heart that warning provided by "the faithful and discreet slave." (Matthew 24:45-47) After reading the straightforward, Bible-based counsel, some wrote to tell how the articles had personally affected them.* One confessed: "For 13 years I was a soap-opera addict. I thought that I was safe simply by attending Christian meetings and being semiregular in the field service. But I adopted the worldly soap-opera attitude that if your husband mistreats you or you feel unloved, adultery is justifiable—he brought it on himself. And so when I felt 'justified' I took this bad course and sinned against Jehovah and my mate." This woman was disfellowshipped. Eventually, she came to her senses, repented, and was reinstated. The articles warning against TV soap operas gave her the strength to refuse to be entertained by what Jehovah hates.—Amos 5:14, 15.

¹⁴ Another reader whose life was affected said: "I cried when I read the articles, for I discovered that my heart was no longer complete toward Jehovah. I promised my God that I would no longer be a slave to these serials." After expressing appreciation for the

* *The Watchtower*, December 1, 1983, page 23.

13, 14. How did some express how they benefited from warnings about TV?

articles, one Christian woman admitted her addiction and wrote: "I wondered . . . if my relationship with Jehovah could be affected. How could I have 'them' as friends and also be a friend to Jehovah?" If such TV shows corrupted hearts 25 years ago, what impact do they have today? (2 Timothy 3:13) We must be aware of Satan's trap of unwholesome entertainment in all its forms, whether TV soap operas, violent video games, or immoral music videos.

The Trap of Personal Differences

¹⁵ Satan uses personal differences as a trap to cause divisions among Jehovah's people. We can be trapped this way regardless of our privileges of service. Some are caught alive by the Devil because they allow personal differences to disrupt the peace and unity and the beautiful spiritual prosperity that Jehovah has brought into existence.—Psalm 133: 1-3.

15. How are some caught alive by the Devil?

What can you do if you have personal differences with a fellow Christian?



¹⁶ During World War I, Satan tried to destroy the earthly part of Jehovah's organization by frontal attack, but he failed. (Revelation 11:7-13) Since then, he has slyly been working to disrupt our unity. When we allow personal differences to cause disunity, we have provided "the birdcatcher" a foothold. We could thus hinder the free flow of holy spirit in our personal lives as well as in the congregation. If that were to happen, Satan would be pleased because any disruption of the peace and unity of the congregation interferes with the preaching work.—Ephesians 4:27, 30-32.

¹⁷ What can you do if you have personal differences with a fellow Christian? Granted, every situation is unique. However, while there may be many reasons why problems develop, there is no reason why personal differences should be left unresolved. (Matthew 5:23, 24; 18:15-17) The advice in God's Word is inspired, perfect. When applied, Bible principles never fail. They always work!

- ¹⁸ Jehovah is "ready to forgive," and he
16. How has Satan slyly been trying to disrupt our unity?
 17. What can help those who have personal differences to resolve them?
 18. Why would imitating Jehovah help us resolve personal differences?

Do You Recall?

- Why is "trembling at men" a deadly trap?
- How does the Devil use the lure of materialism?
- How has Satan ensnared some with the trap of unwholesome entertainment?
- What trap does the Devil use to disrupt our unity?

grants "true forgiveness." (Psalm 86:5; 130:4) We show that we are beloved children of Jehovah when we imitate him. (Ephesians 5:1) We are all sinners and desperately in need of Jehovah's forgiveness. Thus, we must be careful if we feel inclined not to forgive someone. We could become like the slave in Jesus' parable who refused to forgive his fellow slave a debt that was but a fraction of the debt that his master had already forgiven him. When the master was informed, he had the unforgiving slave thrown into prison. Jesus concluded the parable by saying: "In like manner my heavenly Father will also deal with you if you do not forgive each one his brother from your hearts." (Matthew 18:21-35) Meditating on that illustration and reflecting on how many times Jehovah has freely forgiven us will surely help us when we are trying to settle personal differences with our brother!—Psalm 19:14.

Safe in "the Secret Place of the Most High"

¹⁹ We live in dangerous times. Satan would certainly have destroyed all of us were it not for Jehovah's loving protection. To avoid being trapped by "the birdcatcher," therefore, we must remain in the figurative place of protection, "dwelling in the secret place of the Most High," procuring "lodging under the very shadow of the Almighty One." —Psalm 91:1.

²⁰ May we always view Jehovah's reminders and directions as protective, never as restrictive. Together we face a predator who has superhuman intelligence. Without Jehovah's loving help, no one will escape being trapped. (Psalm 124:7, 8) So let us pray that Jehovah will deliver us from the traps of "the birdcatcher"!—Matthew 6:13.

- 19, 20. How should we view Jehovah's "secret place" and "shadow" during these dangerous times?

Questions From Readers

Was it not wrong for Jacob to misrepresent himself as Esau, as recorded at Genesis 27:18, 19?

You may be familiar with this account. Isaac in his old age told Esau to hunt some venison, saying: "Let me eat, in order that my soul may bless you before I die." Having heard what her husband said, Rebekah prepared a tasty dish and instructed Jacob: "You must bring [the food] to your father and he must eat it, in order that he may bless you before his death." Then Jacob, wearing Esau's garments and having the skins of young goats on his neck and hands, went in to his father with the tasty dish. When Isaac asked him, "Who are you, my son?" Jacob replied: "I am Esau your firstborn." Isaac believed him and bestowed the blessing upon him.—Genesis 27:1-29.

The Bible does not give all the details as to why Rebekah and Jacob acted as they did, though it does indicate that the situation arose suddenly. We should note that God's Word neither justifies nor condemns what Rebekah and Jacob did, establishing no precedent for lies and deception. The Bible does, however, shed light on the situation.

First, the account makes clear that Jacob was entitled to his father's blessing; Esau was not. Earlier, Jacob had legally purchased the birthright from his unappreciative twin brother, who sold it for a meal to satisfy his hunger. Esau "despised the birthright." (Genesis 25:29-34) So

in approaching his father, Jacob was seeking a blessing that rightfully belonged to him.

Second, when Isaac realized that he had given the blessing to Jacob, he did not seek to change what he had done. Perhaps he recalled what Jehovah had told Rebekah before the twins were born: "The older will serve the younger." (Genesis 25:23) It is noteworthy too that when Jacob was about to depart for Haran, Isaac expanded the blessing that he had given earlier.—Genesis 28:1-4.

Finally, it should be remembered that Jehovah was both aware of and interested in all that was happening. The blessing that Isaac gave was tied up with God's promise to Abraham. (Genesis 12:2, 3) If God had not wanted the blessing to go to Jacob, he could have intervened in some way. Instead, Jehovah confirmed the matter to Jacob, saying: "By means of your seed all the families of the ground will certainly bless themselves."—Genesis 28:10-15.



"WHAT IS TRUTH?"

THAT question was cynically posed to Jesus by the Roman Governor Pontius Pilate. He was not interested in an answer, and Jesus did not give him one. Perhaps Pilate viewed truth as too elusive to grasp.

—John 18:38.

This disdainful attitude toward truth is shared by many today, including religious leaders, educators, and politicians. They hold that truth—especially moral and spiritual truth—is not absolute but relative and ever changing. This, of course, implies that people can determine for themselves what is right and what is wrong. (Isaiah 5:20, 21) It also allows people to reject as out-of-date the values and moral standards held by past generations.

The statement that prompted Pilate's question is worth noting. Jesus had said: "For this I have been born, and for this I

have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth." (John 18:37) Truth to Jesus was no vague, incomprehensible concept. He promised his disciples: "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free."—John 8:32.

Where can such truth be found? On one occasion, Jesus said in prayer to God: "Your word is truth." (John 17:17) The Bible, written under divine inspiration, reveals truth that provides both reliable guidance and a sure hope for the future—everlasting life.—2 Timothy 3:15-17.

Pilate indifferently rejected the opportunity to learn such truth. What about you? Why not ask Jehovah's Witnesses what "the truth" that Jesus taught is all about? They will be glad to share that truth with you.

