

DECEMBER 15, 2014

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



## STUDY ARTICLES

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## COSTA RICA

**COVER:** Some who come to enjoy Tamarindo Beach on the Pacific Coast of Costa Rica are happy to learn that, in time, the whole earth will be a paradise for us to cultivate and enjoy

PUBLISHERS

29,185

PIONEERS

2,858

God's name, Jehovah,

# Jéoba

in the Bribri language

# Jehová

in the Cabecar language

Two congregations and two groups use the Bribri language, and three congregations and four groups use the Cabecar language. Both are indigenous American languages

## STUDY ARTICLES

- 'Listen and Understand the Meaning'
- Do You "Grasp the Meaning"?

How can we make sure that we understand the meaning of Jesus' illustrations? These two articles will show us how to analyze seven illustrations that Jesus used. They will also help us to see how we can apply in our Christian ministry the lessons learned from these illustrations.

- Facing the End of This Old World Together
- Do You Appreciate What You Have Received?

In a world where many youths are centered on self, why should Christian youths seek unity with God's people? These articles will consider good examples and bad ones, addressing issues that will help young and old alike to make wise choices.

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 **THE WATCHTOWER®**  
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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# He 'Knew the Way'



GUY HOLLIS PIERCE, a member of the Governing Body of Jehovah's Witnesses, finished his earthly course on Tuesday, March 18, 2014. He was 79 years old when his hope to be one of Christ's resurrected brothers became a reality.—Heb. 2:10-12; 1 Pet. 3:18.

Guy Pierce was born in Auburn, California, U.S.A., on November 6, 1934, and was baptized in 1955. He married his beloved wife, Penny, in 1977 and raised a family. His experience as a family man contributed to his fatherly manner. By 1982 he and Penny were busy in the pioneer work, and in 1986 he began 11 years of service as a circuit overseer in the United States.

In 1997, Guy and Penny Pierce began to serve as members of the United States Bethel family. Brother Pierce worked in the Service Department, and in 1998 he was appointed as a helper to the Personnel Committee of the Governing Body. Brother Pierce's appointment as a member of the Governing Body was announced on October 2, 1999, at the annual meeting of the Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. In recent years, he served with the Personnel, Writing, Publishing, and Coordinators' committees.

People of varied backgrounds and cultures were drawn to Brother Pierce because of his warm smile and good sense of humor. However, the qualities that especially endeared him to others were his love, his humility, his respect for righteous laws and principles, and his complete faith in Jehovah. To Guy Pierce, there was a greater pos-

sibility that the sun would not rise than that Jehovah's promises would go unfulfilled, and he wanted to share that truth with the whole world.

Brother Pierce was tireless in serving Jehovah, rising early in the morning and often working late into the night. His travels to encourage his Christian brothers and sisters took him all over the world, and he was never too busy to spend time with individual Bethel family members and others who sought his fellowship, advice, and assistance. Even after years have passed, fellow believers recall his hospitality, friendship, and Scriptural encouragement.

Our brother and dear friend is survived by his wife and six children, as well as grandchildren and great-grandchildren. He also had countless spiritual children. A memorial talk for Brother Pierce was given at Brooklyn Bethel on Saturday, March 22, 2014, by Mark Sanderson, a fellow member of the Governing Body. Among other matters, he spoke of Brother Pierce's heavenly hope and read Jesus' words: "In the house of my Father are many dwelling places. . . . If I go my way and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will receive you home to myself, so that where I am you also may be. And where I am going, you know the way."—John 14:2-4.

True, we will miss Brother Pierce very much. Yet, we rejoice that he 'knew the way' to his permanent 'dwelling place.'



# Jehovah Richly Blesses a Willing Spirit



OUR Creator has dignified humans with the priceless gift of free will. Furthermore, he richly blesses those who unselfishly use their free will to advance true worship and who do their part to sanctify his holy name and support his grand purpose. Jehovah does not want mechanical obedience impelled by threats and coercion. Instead, he highly values willing devotion motivated by genuine love and deep appreciation.

For example, when the Israelites were in the wilderness of Sinai, Jehovah instructed them to build a place of worship. He said: “Take up a contribution for Jehovah from among yourselves. Let everyone with a willing heart bring a contribution for Jehovah.” (Ex. 35:5) Each Israelite could give whatever he was able to give, and each voluntary contribution—no matter what it might be or how much—could be used in an appropriate way to carry out the divine purpose. What was the response?

“Everyone whose heart impelled him” and “everyone whose spirit incited him” made a voluntary offering, “each with a willing heart.” Men and women willingly brought something for Jehovah’s work: brooches, earrings, rings, gold, silver, copper, blue thread, purple wool, scarlet material, fine linen, goat hair, ram skins dyed red,

sealskins, acacia wood, gemstones, balsam, and oil. Eventually, “the goods were enough for all the work to be done, and more than enough.” —Ex. 35:21-24, 27-29; 36:7.

What brought Jehovah the most pleasure was, not the material offerings, but the willing spirit of those who thus supported pure worship. They were also moved to contribute their time and labor. “All the skilled women spun with their hands,” says the account. Indeed, “all the skilled women whose hearts impelled them spun the goat hair.” Moreover, Jehovah gave Bezalel “wisdom, understanding, and knowledge of every sort of craftsmanship.” In fact, God filled Bezalel and Oholiab with the skill needed to do all the work that was commissioned.—Ex. 35:25, 26, 30-35.

When Jehovah invited the Israelites to make a donation, he had full confidence that “everyone with a willing heart” would support true worship. In turn, he unstintingly blessed the willinghearted with guidance and boundless joy. Jehovah thus demonstrated that when he blesses his servants’ willing spirit, he can make sure that there is no lack of resources or expertise to accomplish his will. (Ps. 34:9) As you unselfishly serve Jehovah, he is sure to bless your willing spirit.

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## HOW SOME CHOOSE TO CONTRIBUTE TO THE WORLDWIDE WORK

As in the apostle Paul's day, many today "set something aside," or budget, an amount of money and place it in the congregation contribution box labeled "Worldwide Work." (1 Cor. 16:2) Each month, congregations forward these contributions to the office of Jehovah's Witnesses that serves their country. It is also possible for you to send donations directly to a legal entity that is used by Jehovah's Witnesses in your country. To learn the name of the primary legal entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses in your country, please contact the branch office that serves the country. The address of the branch office can be found on [www.jw.org](http://www.jw.org). The types of donations that you can send directly are the following:

### OUTRIGHT DONATIONS

- Donations via electronic bank transfer, debit card, or credit card. In some branches this is also possible using [jw.org](http://jw.org) or another designated Web site.
- Donations of cash, jewelry, or other valuable personal property. Include a letter indicating that the cash or the item is an outright donation.

### CONDITIONAL DONATION ARRANGEMENT

- Donations of cash with the condition that it can be returned if needed by the donor.
- Include a letter stating that the donation is conditional.

### CHARITABLE PLANNING

In addition to gifts of money and valuable personal property, there

are other methods of giving to benefit Kingdom service worldwide. These are listed below. Regardless of the method or methods you would like to use, please first contact the branch office that serves your country to see which methods are available in the country. Since legal requirements and tax laws vary, it is important to consult qualified tax and legal advisers before choosing the best way to donate.

**Insurance:** A donation made by specifying an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy or a retirement/pension plan.

**Bank Accounts:** Bank accounts, certificates of deposit, or individual retirement accounts set up as a trust or made payable on death to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses in accord with local bank requirements.

**Stocks and Bonds:** Stocks and bonds donated to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses as an outright gift or by means of a written agreement to transfer on death.

**Real Estate:** Salable real estate donated to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses, either by making an outright gift or, in the case of residential property, by reserving a life estate to the donor, who can continue to live in the residence during his or her lifetime.

**Gift Annuity:** Money or securities donated to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses under an arrangement where the donor receives a specified annuity payment every year for life. The donor may receive an income-tax

deduction for the year in which the gift annuity is established.

**Wills and Trusts:** Property or money may be bequeathed to an entity used by Jehovah's Witnesses by means of a legally executed will or by specifying the entity as the beneficiary of a trust agreement. This arrangement may provide certain tax advantages.

As the term "charitable planning" implies, these types of donations typically require some planning on the part of the donor. To assist individuals desiring to benefit the worldwide work of Jehovah's Witnesses through some form of charitable giving, a brochure entitled *Charitable Planning to Benefit Kingdom Service Worldwide* has been prepared in English and Spanish. The brochure was written to provide information on a variety of ways that gifts may be made now or later, as through a bequest at death. The information covered in this brochure may not apply fully to your situation because of tax or other laws in your country. Hence, after reading the brochure, you should confer with your own legal or tax advisers. By using such methods of charitable giving, many have been able to help support our religious and humanitarian activities worldwide and maximize their tax benefits. If available in your country, the brochure may be obtained by requesting a copy from the secretary of the local congregation.

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For more information, you may contact the branch that serves your country.



## ‘Listen and Understand the Meaning’

*“Listen to me, all of you, and understand the meaning.”*

—MARK 7:14.

### WHAT LESSON DO YOU LEARN FROM THE ILLUSTRATION ABOUT . . .

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the mustard grain?

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the leaven?

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the traveling merchant and the hidden treasure?

A PERSON may hear the sounds of someone speaking to him. He may even note the tone of voice. But of what use would that be to him if he did not understand the meaning of the words being spoken? (1 Cor. 14:9) In a similar way, thousands heard what Jesus was saying. He even spoke to them in a language that they could understand. However, not all of them understood the meaning of his words. For this reason, Jesus told his audience: “Listen to me, all of you, and understand the meaning.”—Mark 7:14.

<sup>2</sup> Why did many fail to understand the meaning of what Jesus said? Some had preconceived opinions and wrong motives. Jesus said of such ones: “You skillfully disregard the commandment of God in order to keep your tradition.” (Mark 7:9) These people did not really try to get the meaning of his words. They did not want to change their ways and views. Their ears may have been open, but their hearts were tightly shut! (**Read Matthew 13:13-15.**) How, though, can we make sure that our hearts remain open so that we can benefit from Jesus’ teaching?

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**1, 2.** Why did many who listened to Jesus fail to understand the meaning of his words?

## HOW TO BENEFIT FROM JESUS' TEACHING

<sup>3</sup> We need to follow the example of Jesus' humble disciples. He said of them: "Happy are your eyes because they see and your ears because they hear." (Matt. 13:16) Why were they able to understand when others were not? First, they were willing to ask questions and to search for the real meaning behind Jesus' words. (Matt. 13:36; Mark 7:17) Second, they were willing to build on what they had already accepted in their hearts. **(Read Matthew 13:11, 12.)** Third, they were willing to use what they had heard and understood, not only in their personal lives but also in their efforts to help others.—Matt. 13:51, 52.

<sup>4</sup> If we want to understand Jesus' illustrations, we need to follow the example of his faithful disciples. This also involves three steps. First, we need to be willing to take the time to study and meditate on what Jesus said, to do the necessary research, and to ask the appropriate questions. This leads to *knowledge*. (Prov. 2:4, 5) Next, we need to see how that knowledge fits in with what we already know, discerning its benefit to us personally. That results in *understanding*. (Prov. 2:2, 3) Finally, we should use what we have learned, putting it into action in our lives. This shows *wisdom* on our part.—Prov. 2:6, 7.

<sup>5</sup> What is the difference between knowledge, understanding, and wisdom? It could be illustrated this way: Imagine you are standing in the middle of a road and a bus is coming toward

you. First, you recognize that it is a bus—that is *knowledge*. Next, you realize that if you remain standing there, you will be hit by the bus—that is *understanding*! So you jump out of the way of the bus—that is *wisdom*! Little wonder the Bible emphasizes the need for us to "safeguard practical wisdom." It means our very life!—Prov. 3:21, 22; 1 Tim. 4:16.

<sup>6</sup> In this article and the following, we will examine seven illustrations that Jesus used. As we do so, we will ask the following questions: What does the illustration mean? (This helps us to gain knowledge.) Why did Jesus give us this illustration? (This leads to understanding.) How can we use this information to help ourselves as well as others? (This is wisdom.) Finally, what does this teach us about Jehovah and Jesus?

### THE MUSTARD GRAIN

<sup>7</sup> **Read Matthew 13:31, 32.** What is the meaning of Jesus' illustration of the mustard grain? The grain itself represents the Kingdom message as well as what results from the preaching of that message—the Christian congregation. Like the mustard grain that is "the tiniest of all the seeds," the Christian congregation had small beginnings in 33 C.E. However, within a few decades, the congregation grew rapidly. It expanded beyond all expectations. (Col. 1:23) This growth was beneficial because Jesus tells us that "the birds of heaven" were able to "find lodging among its branches." These figurative birds picture righthearted individuals who find spiritual food,

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3. Why were the disciples able to understand Jesus' words?

4. To understand Jesus' illustrations, what three steps are involved?

5. Illustrate the difference between knowledge, understanding, and wisdom.

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6. What four questions will we ask while examining seven of Jesus' illustrations? (See accompanying box.)

7. What is the meaning of the illustration of the mustard grain?



## When reading Jesus' illustrations, ask the following questions:

- What does this illustration mean?
- Why did Jesus use this illustration?
- How can I use the lesson I learned from this illustration?
- What does this illustration teach me about Jehovah and Jesus?



shade, and shelter within the Christian congregation.—Compare Ezekiel 17:23.

**<sup>8</sup> Why did Jesus use this illustration?** He used the amazing growth of a mustard grain to illustrate the power of God's Kingdom arrangement to expand, protect, and conquer all obstacles. Since 1914 the growth of the visible part of God's organization has been phenomenal! (Isa. 60:22) Those associating with that organization have enjoyed wonderful spiritual protection. (Prov. 2:7; Isa. 32:1, 2) Additionally, the ongoing expansion of Kingdom interests has proved to be unstoppable, overcoming all opposition.—Isa. 54:17.

**<sup>9</sup> What can we learn from the illustration of the mustard grain?** Perhaps we live in an area where there are few Witnesses or where we do not see a lot of immediate results in our preaching work. Yet, remembering that the King-

dom arrangement can overcome all obstacles will strengthen us to endure. For example, when Brother Edwin Skinner arrived in India in 1926, there were only a handful of Witnesses in that country. Initially, there was little progress, and the work was described as "hard going." But he kept on preaching and saw how the Kingdom message overcame great obstacles. Now there are over 37,000 active Witnesses in India, with over 108,000 attending the Memorial last year. Also consider an example of how impressively the Kingdom arrangement has expanded. In the same year that Brother Skinner arrived in India, the work had just started in Zambia. Now over 170,000 publishers preach there, and 763,915 attended the Memorial in 2013. This means that 1 in every 18 persons in Zambia attended. What amazing growth!

### THE LEAVEN

**<sup>10</sup> Read Matthew 13:33. What is the**

**10.** What is the meaning of the illustration of the leaven?

**8.** Why did Jesus use the illustration about the mustard grain?

**9.** (a) What lesson can we learn from the illustration of the mustard grain? (b) What does this teach us about Jehovah and Jesus?



**meaning of the illustration of the leaven?** This illustration also refers to the Kingdom message and what it produces. “The whole mass” of flour represents all the nations, and the fermenting process pictures the spread of the Kingdom message by means of the preaching work. Whereas the growth of the mustard grain is clearly observable, the spreading of the leaven is initially unseen. It is not until some time later that the effects become evident.

**11 Why did Jesus use this illustration?**

He was showing that the Kingdom message has power to spread pervasively and to cause changes. The Kingdom message has reached “the most distant part of the earth.” (Acts 1:8) However, the changes caused by the message are not always discernible; some of the effects may even go unnoticed at first. But there is change—not just change with regard to numbers but also change in the personality of those who accept this pervasive message.—Rom. 12:2; Eph. 4:22, 23.

**12** The effect of the preaching work is often seen years after the initial work has been done. For example, Franz and Margit, who are now serving at another branch, were in 1982 serving at the branch office in Brazil. They witnessed in a small rural town. Among the Bible studies that were started was one with a mother and her four children. The oldest boy, just 12 years of age at the time, was extremely shy and often tried to hide before the study began. Because of a change of assignment, the couple were

**11.** Why did Jesus use the illustration about the leaven?

**12, 13.** Give examples of how the Kingdom-preaching work has grown just as described in the illustration about the leaven.

not able to continue the study. But they were able to visit this town 25 years later. What did they find? A congregation of 69 publishers, 13 of whom were regular pioneers, all meeting in a new Kingdom Hall. And what about the shy boy? He now serves as the coordinator of the body of elders! Just like the leaven in Jesus’ illustration, the Kingdom message had grown and changed the lives of many—much to the joy of the visiting couple!

**13** The unseen power of the Kingdom message to change people has particularly been evident in countries where the Kingdom work is legally restricted. It is hard to know how far the message has reached in such countries, and we are often surprised by the results. Take Cuba, for example. The Kingdom message reached there in 1910, and Brother Russell visited Cuba in 1913. However, the progress was slow at first. What do we now see in Cuba? There are over 96,000 publishers preaching the good news, and 229,726 attended the Memorial in 2013—that is 1 out of every 48 inhabitants of that island nation. Even in countries that are not under ban, the Kingdom message may have reached into areas where local Witnesses think that little witnessing can be done.\*—Eccl. 8:7; 11:5.

**14 How can we benefit from what Jesus taught us in the illustration of the leaven?** When we meditate on the

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\* Similar experiences have occurred in such countries as Argentina (2001 *Yearbook*, page 186); East Germany (1999 *Yearbook*, page 83); Papua New Guinea (2005 *Yearbook*, page 63); and Robinson Crusoe Island (*The Watchtower*, June 15, 2000, page 9).

**14, 15.** (a) How can we personally benefit from the lesson behind the illustration of the leaven? (b) What does this teach us about Jehovah and Jesus?

meaning of Jesus' illustration, we realize that there is no need for us to be overly concerned about how the Kingdom message will reach the millions who have not yet heard it. Jehovah has everything under control. But what is our work? God's Word answers: "Sow your seed in the morning and do not let your hand rest until the evening; for you do not know which will have success, whether this one or that one, or whether they will both do well." (Eccl. 11:6) Of course, at the same time, we should never forget to pray for the success of the preaching work, especially in countries where the work is restricted.—Eph. 6:18-20.

<sup>15</sup> Additionally, we should not be discouraged if we do not at first see results from our work. We should never despise "the day of small beginnings." (Zech. 4:10) The results may eventually turn out to be a lot greater and more wonderful than we had ever anticipated!—Ps. 40:5; Zech. 4:7.

### THE TRAVELING MERCHANT AND THE HIDDEN TREASURE

<sup>16</sup> **Read Matthew 13:44-46.** What is the meaning of the illustration about the traveling merchant and that of the hidden treasure? In Jesus' day, some merchants would travel as far as the Indian Ocean to obtain the finest pearls. The merchant in this illustration represents righthearted people who go to great lengths to satisfy their spiritual needs. The "one pearl of high value" pictures the precious truth of the Kingdom. Having recognized the value of that pearl, the merchant was willing to sell "promptly" all the things he had so that he could buy it. Jesus also spoke

<sup>16.</sup> What is the meaning of the illustration about the traveling merchant and the illustration about the hidden treasure?

of a man who was working in a field and found "hidden" treasure. Unlike the merchant, this man was not searching for treasure. But like the merchant, he was willing to sell "everything" in order to obtain the treasure.

<sup>17</sup> **Why did Jesus give those two parables?** He was showing that the truth is found in different ways. Some people are searching for it and have gone to great lengths to find it. Others, although not searching for it, have found it—perhaps by having it brought to them. Whatever the case, each man recognized the value of what he had found and was willing to make huge sacrifices to get ahold of it.

<sup>18</sup> **How can we benefit from these two illustrations?** (Matt. 6:19-21) Ask yourself: 'Do I have the attitude that these men had? Do I treasure the truth in a similar way? Am I willing to make sacrifices to get ahold of it, or do I allow other things, such as the cares of daily life, to distract me from it?' (Matt. 6:22-24, 33; Luke 5:27, 28; Phil. 3:8) The deeper our heartfelt joy about finding the truth, the stronger our determination to keep it first in our life will be.

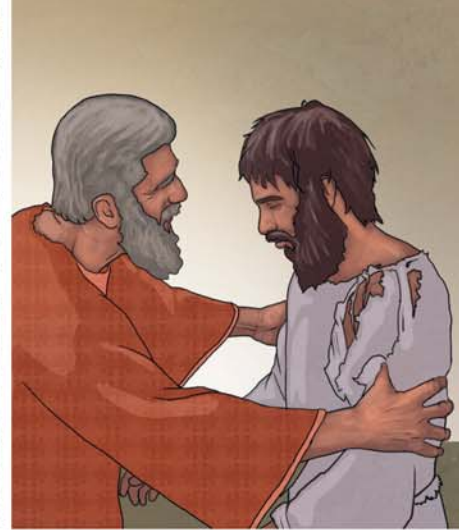
<sup>19</sup> May we show that we have listened and really understood the meaning of these Kingdom illustrations. Remember, we do that not just by knowing their meaning but by applying the lessons we learn from them. In the next article, we will consider three more illustrations and see what lessons we can learn from them.

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<sup>17.</sup> Why did Jesus give the illustrations about the traveling merchant and the hidden treasure?

<sup>18.</sup> (a) How can we benefit from these two illustrations? (b) What does this teach us about Jehovah and Jesus?

<sup>19.</sup> What will we consider in the next article?



## Do You “Grasp the Meaning”?

*“He opened up their minds fully to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures.”—LUKE 24:45.*

IT WAS still the day of Jesus’ resurrection. Two of the disciples were walking to a village about seven miles (11.2 km) from Jerusalem. Not knowing that Jesus had been resurrected, they were heavyhearted because of recent events. Suddenly, Jesus appeared and started walking with them. He was able to comfort these disciples. How? “Starting with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them things pertaining to himself in all the Scriptures.” (Luke 24:13-15, 27) At that, their hearts started to burn within them because he was “fully opening up,” or “clearly explaining,” the Scriptures to them.—Luke 24:32; ftn.

<sup>2</sup> That same evening, these two disciples returned to Jerusalem. Finding the apostles, they related their experience to them. As they were speaking, Jesus appeared to all of them. However, his apostles were terrified. Doubts came up in their hearts. How did Jesus strengthen them? We are told: “He opened up their minds fully to grasp the meaning of the Scriptures.”—Luke 24:45.

<sup>3</sup> Just like those disciples, we may at times be heavyhearted.

1, 2. How did Jesus strengthen his disciples on the day of his resurrection?

3. What challenges may we face, and what can help us to gain a balanced view of our ministry?

**WHAT LESSON DO  
YOU LEARN FROM THE  
ILLUSTRATION ABOUT . . .**

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the sower who sleeps?

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the dragnet?

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the prodigal son?

Perhaps we are busy in the work of the Lord, but we are discouraged because we do not see results. (1 Cor. 15:58) Or it may seem that those with whom we are studying are making little progress. Others we are helping may even turn their backs on Jehovah. What can we do to gain a balanced view of our ministry? One thing that can help us is that we grasp fully the meaning of Jesus' illustrations recorded in the Holy Scriptures. Let us consider three of those illustrations and see what lessons we can learn.

### THE SOWER WHO SLEEPS

**4 Read Mark 4:26-29. What is the meaning of Jesus' illustration about the sower who sleeps?** The man in the illustration represents individual Kingdom proclaimers. The seed is the Kingdom message that is preached to honest-hearted ones. As in a normal routine of life, the sower "sleeps at night and rises up by day." The growing process takes place over a period of time, from the initial planting to the final harvesting. During that period "the seeds sprout and grow tall." This growth takes place "on its own," gradually and in stages. In a similar way, spiritual growth occurs gradually and in stages. When an individual progresses to the point that he is motivated to serve God, he bears fruit in the sense that he dedicates his life to Jehovah and gets baptized.

**5 Why did Jesus tell this illustration?** Jesus helps us to realize that Jehovah is the one who makes the truth grow in the hearts of "rightly disposed" ones. (Acts

13:48; 1 Cor. 3:7) We plant and water, but we do not control the growth. We cannot force it or speed it up. Just like the man in the illustration, we do not know how the growth takes place. It often goes unnoticed by us as we go about our normal, daily activities. In time, though, the Kingdom seed may bear fruit. The new disciple then joins us in the harvest work, and we benefit from his assistance.—John 4:36-38.

**6 What can we learn from this illustration?** First of all, we have to admit that we have no control over the spiritual growth of a Bible student. Modesty on our part will help us to avoid the temptation to pressure or force a student to get baptized. We do all we can to assist and support the person, but we humbly admit that ultimately the decision to make a dedication belongs to that person. Dedication is something that must spring from a willing heart motivated by love for God. Anything less would not be acceptable to Jehovah.—Ps. 51:12; 54:6; 110:3.

**7** Second, understanding the lesson behind this illustration will help us not to be discouraged if we do not at first see results from our work. We need to be patient. (Jas. 5:7, 8) Even though the seed does not bear fruit, if we have done our best to help the student, we realize that this outcome is not a sign of unfaithfulness on our part. Jehovah allows the seed of truth to flourish only in a humble heart that is willing to make changes. (Matt. 13:23) So we should not judge the

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**6.** What should we acknowledge with regard to spiritual growth?

**7. 8.** (a) What other lessons do we learn from Jesus' illustration of the sower who sleeps? Give an example. (b) What does this teach us about Jehovah and Jesus?

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**4.** What is the meaning of Jesus' illustration about the sower who sleeps?

**5.** Why did Jesus tell the illustration of the sower who sleeps?



effectiveness of our ministry merely by the results. In Jehovah's eyes the success of our ministry is not determined by the response of those whom we teach. Rather, he treasures our faithful efforts regardless of the results.—**Read Luke 10:17-20; 1 Corinthians 3:8.**

<sup>8</sup> Third, we do not always discern the changes that are taking place within a person. For example, a couple with whom a missionary had been studying approached him, asking to become unbaptized publishers. He reminded the couple that in order to qualify, they would have to stop smoking. Much to his surprise, they told him that they had quit several months before. Why did they quit? They had come to realize that Jehovah could see them smoking and that he hates hypocrisy. So their hearts motivated them to make a decision—either smoke in front of the missionary or stop altogether. Their newly developed love for Jehovah helped them to make the right decision. They had grown spiritually, even though the missionary had no idea of the change that had taken place.

### THE DRAGNET

<sup>9</sup> **Read Matthew 13:47-50.** What is the meaning of Jesus' illustration about the dragnet? Jesus likened the preaching of the Kingdom message to all mankind to the lowering of a large dragnet into the sea. Just as such a net indiscriminately catches large numbers of "fish of every kind," our preaching work attracts millions of people of all kinds. (Isa. 60:5) The large number of individuals who attend our conventions and the Memorial each year is evidence of this fact. Some

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9. What is the meaning of the illustration about the dragnet?

of these symbolic fish are "fine" and are gathered into the Christian congregation. Others, though, are found to be "unsuitable"; not all those gathered prove to be acceptable to Jehovah.

<sup>10</sup> **Why did Jesus tell this illustration?** The symbolic separating of fish does not refer to the final judgment during the great tribulation. Rather, it highlights what would happen during the last days of this wicked system. Jesus showed that not all those attracted to the truth will take a stand for Jehovah. Many have associated with us at our meetings. Others have been willing to study the Bible with us but are not willing to make a commitment. (1 Ki. 18:21) Still others are no longer associating with the Christian congregation. Some youths have been raised by Christian parents and yet have not developed a love for Jehovah's standards. No matter what the situation, Jesus emphasized that everyone needs to make a personal decision. Those who do are viewed by him as "the precious," or "desirable," things "of all the nations."—Hag. 2:7; ftn.

<sup>11</sup> **How can we benefit from the illustration of the dragnet?** Understanding the lesson of this illustration helps us to avoid being overly distraught or disappointed if a Bible student or one of our children does not make the truth his own. This may happen despite all our best efforts. Agreeing to have a Bible study or being raised around the truth does not automatically mean that a person will develop a strong personal relationship with Jehovah. Those unwilling

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10. Why did Jesus tell the illustration about the dragnet?

11, 12. (a) How can we benefit from the illustration of the dragnet? (b) What does this teach us about Jehovah and Jesus?



to submit to Jehovah's rulership will eventually be separated from God's people.

<sup>12</sup> Does this mean that those who have left the truth will never be allowed to return to the congregation? Or if someone fails to dedicate his life to Jehovah, will he be forever classified as someone "unsuitable"? No. There is still a window of opportunity for such ones before the outbreak of the great tribulation. It is as if Jehovah calls out to them: "Return to me, and I will return to you." (Mal. 3:7) This fact is emphasized by another illustration given by Jesus, that of the prodigal son.—**Read Luke 15:11-32.**

### THE PRODIGAL SON

<sup>13</sup> What is the meaning of Jesus' illustration of the prodigal son? The compassionate father in this illustration pictures our loving heavenly Father, Jehovah. The son who asks for his inheritance and then squanders it represents those who have strayed from the congregation. By leaving, it is as if they travel to "a distant country," Satan's world,

**13.** What is the meaning of the illustration of the prodigal son?

which is alienated from Jehovah. (Eph. 4:18; Col. 1:21) Some later come to their senses, however, and make the challenging journey back to Jehovah's organization. These humble, repentant ones are eagerly welcomed back by our forgiving Father.—Isa. 44:22; 1 Pet. 2:25.

<sup>14</sup> Why did Jesus tell this illustration? In a very appealing way, Jesus illustrated that Jehovah wants straying ones to return to Him. The father in the illustration never stopped hoping that his son would return. When he caught sight of his son returning, even though "he was still a long way off," the father acted quickly to welcome him back. What a strong incentive for those who have left the truth to return to Jehovah without delay! They may be spiritually exhausted, and the way back may seem to be embarrassing and difficult. But it is worth the effort—even the heavens will rejoice when they return.—Luke 15:7.

<sup>15</sup> How can we benefit from the illus-

**14.** Why did Jesus tell the illustration of the prodigal son?

**15, 16.** (a) What lessons do we learn from Jesus' illustration of the prodigal son? Give some examples. (b) What does this teach us about Jehovah and Jesus?

... consider a modern-day application



Some of those attracted to the truth will  
take their stand for Jehovah  
(See paragraphs 9-12)

tration of the prodigal son? We should imitate Jehovah's example. Never would we want to be so "overly righteous" that we refuse to welcome repentant sinners back. This would result only in spiritual "ruin." (Eccl. 7:16) We can learn another lesson from this. Someone who leaves the congregation should be viewed as "a lost sheep," not a lost cause. (Ps. 119:176) If we meet a person who has strayed from the congregation, will we offer loving and practical help to assist him to return? Will we promptly inform the elders so that they can offer appropriate help? We will if we wisely apply the lesson we learn from Jesus' illustration of the prodigal son.

<sup>16</sup> Note how some modern-day prodigals have expressed their appreciation for Jehovah's mercy and the love and support of the congregation. A brother who was disfellowshipped for 25 years states: "My joy since my reinstatement has continued to increase as I have received 'seasons of refreshing' from Jehovah. (Acts 3:19) Everyone is so supportive and loving! I have a wonderful spiritual family now." A young sister who strayed from Jehovah and was away for five years said of her return: "I can't

describe to you how it felt to see the love Jesus talked about expressed toward me so clearly. Being part of Jehovah's organization is priceless!"

<sup>17</sup> What practical lessons have we learned from these three illustrations? First, we have to acknowledge that we have no control over spiritual growth. That belongs to Jehovah. Second, we cannot realistically expect that all those who associate with us and study with us will take a stand for the truth. Finally, even though some may leave the truth and turn their backs on Jehovah, let us never give up hope that they will return. And if they do return, let us welcome them in a way that reflects Jehovah's viewpoint.

<sup>18</sup> May each of us continue to seek knowledge, understanding, and wisdom. As we read Jesus' illustrations, ask what they mean, why they were recorded in the Bible, how we can apply the lessons, and what we thus can learn about Jehovah and Jesus. Doing so will show that we are, in fact, grasping the meaning of Jesus' words.

**17, 18.** (a) What practical lessons have we learned from the three illustrations we have considered? (b) What should be our resolve?

Have you carefully read the recent issues of *The Watchtower*?  
Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

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**Is cremation proper for Christians?**

Whether to cremate or not is a personal decision. Though the Bible does not comment directly on this practice, it is worth noting that the dead bodies of King Saul and his son Jonathan were burned and then buried. (1 Sam. 31:2, 8-13)—6/15, page 7.

**How can we be sure that God does not cause bad things to happen?**

God is righteous in all his ways. He is just, faithful, and upright. Jehovah is also tender in affection and merciful. (Deut. 32:4; Ps. 145:17; Jas. 5:11)—7/1, page 4.

**What challenges might one face when moving to a foreign land to serve where the need is greater?**

Three challenges are (1) adapting to a different life-style, (2) coping with homesickness, and (3) fitting in with the local brothers. Many who have met these challenges have been richly blessed.—7/15, pages 4-5.

**Why did Joseph's brothers turn on him?**

For one thing, Jacob showed Joseph special favor, giving him a special robe. Joseph's brothers became jealous and sold him into slavery.—8/1, pages 11-13.

**Why are the new tracts so effective and easy to use?**

All of them follow the same format. Each tract prompts us to read a Bible text and present the householder with a question. Whatever he answers, we can turn to the inside and show him what the Bible says. We can also point out a question for a return visit.—8/15, pages 13-14.

**What is the Syriac Peshitta?**

Syriac, an Aramaic dialect, came into wide use in the second or third century C.E. It seems that Syriac was the first language into which parts of the Christian Greek Scriptures were translated. The Bible in Syriac became known as the *Peshitta*.—9/1, pages 13-14.

**What can Christian parents do to shepherd their children?**

It is vital to listen to children so as to know them. Strive to feed them spiritually. Guide them lovingly, for example, when they try to come to grips with spiritual doubts.—9/15, pages 18-21.

**Under God's Kingdom, what things will be no more?**

Health problems, death, unemployment, war, food shortages, and poverty will be no more.—10/1, pages 6-7.

**What covenant in the Bible allows others to rule with Christ?**

After the last Passover meal

with the apostles, Jesus made a covenant with his faithful disciples that can be referred to as the Kingdom covenant. (Luke 22:28-30) It assured them that they would rule with Jesus in heaven.—10/15, pages 16-17.

**Give two Bible examples that prove that Satan is real.**

The Scriptures say that Satan spoke with Jesus in an effort to tempt him. Also, in Job's day, Satan spoke with God. These accounts prove that Satan is a real person.—11/1, pages 4-5.

**Who were the "people for his name" that James spoke of, as stated at Acts 15:14?**

These were the Jewish and non-Jewish believers whom God selected to be a chosen race to "declare abroad the excellencies" of the One who called them. (1 Pet. 2:9, 10)—11/15, pages 24-25.

**Where was Timgad, and what attitude did some there have?**

Timgad was a large Roman city in North Africa (modern-day Algeria). Showing what some there believed, an excavated inscription reads: "Hunting, Bathing, Playing, Laughing—That's Living!" That is similar to the view mentioned at 1 Corinthians 15:32.—12/1, pages 8-10.





## Should You Change Your Mind?

A GROUP of young Christians decide to go and see a movie. They had heard that many of their peers at school had really enjoyed it. When they get to the theater, they look at the posters and see powerful weapons and scantily clad women. What will they do? Will they go into the theater and see the movie anyway?

This situation illustrates that we face a number of decisions that may affect—either for good or for bad—our spirituality and our relationship with Jehovah. At times, you may intend to do something, but then you reevaluate the situation, and you change your mind. Is that just being indecisive, or might it be appropriate?

### **When Changing Your Mind IS INAPPROPRIATE**

Our love for Jehovah moved us to dedicate our life to him and get baptized. It is

our heartfelt desire to remain faithful to God. However, our enemy Satan the Devil is determined to break our integrity. (Rev. 12:17) We have made the decision to serve Jehovah and observe his commandments. With respect to our dedication to Jehovah, how sad it would be to change our mind! It could cost us our life.

More than 26 centuries ago, Babylonian King Nebuchadnezzar set up an enormous image of gold and decreed that all fall down and worship it. Any who failed to do so would be thrown into a fiery furnace. Three God-fearing worshippers of Jehovah—Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego—did not comply. Because they would not bow to that image, they were thrown into the fiery furnace. They were miraculously saved by Jehovah, but they had been willing to risk their lives rather than compromise their decision to serve God.—Dan. 3:1-27.

Later, the prophet Daniel persevered in prayer, despite the threat of being thrown into the lions' pit. Yes, he stuck to his practice of offering prayer to Jehovah three times a day. Daniel did not change in his determination to worship the true God. As a result, the prophet was saved "from the paw of the lions."—Dan. 6:1-27.

God's modern-day servants also live up to their dedication to him. At a school in Africa, a group of students who are Jehovah's Witnesses refused to participate in a ceremony to worship a national symbol. They were threatened with expulsion from school if they would not participate along with the other students. Shortly afterward, the minister of education visited the town and talked to some of the Witness students. Politely but fearlessly these young Witnesses explained their stand. Since then, the issue has not been raised again. Young brothers and sisters are able to go to school without being pressured to compromise their relationship with Jehovah.

Consider also Joseph, whose wife suffered from cancer and suddenly passed away. Joseph's family understood and respected his wishes on funeral rites. However, his wife's family are not in the truth, and they wanted certain burial customs performed, including rites that are displeasing to God. Joseph relates: "When I would not compromise, they endeavored to influence my children, who remained resolute. The relatives also tried to organize a wake at my home as is the custom, but I told them that if they insisted on having a wake, it would not be at my home. They knew that a wake would not be in harmony with my beliefs nor those my wife had had, so after much discussion they held it at another location.

"During this difficult time of mourning, I supplicated Jehovah for help so that our

family would not break his laws. He heard my prayers and helped us to remain firm despite the pressure." For Joseph and his children, changing their mind with regard to their worship was not an option.

### **When Changing Your Mind MAY BE AN OPTION**

Not long after Passover of 32 C.E., a Syrophoenician woman approached Jesus Christ in the area of Sidon. She repeatedly asked him to expel a demon from her daughter. At first, Jesus did not say a word in answer to her. He told his disciples: "I was not sent to anyone except to the lost sheep of the house of Israel." When she persisted, Jesus said: "It is not right to take the bread of the children and throw it to the little dogs." Demonstrating great faith, she replied: "Yes, Lord, but really the little dogs do eat of the crumbs falling from the table of their masters." Jesus acceded to her request and healed her daughter.—Matt. 15:21-28.

Doing that, Jesus was imitating Jehovah in showing a willingness to change when the situation allows for such action. For example, God intended to exterminate the Israelites when they made a golden calf, but he let Moses entreat Him to reconsider His decision.—Ex. 32:7-14.

The apostle Paul imitated Jehovah and Jesus. For a time, Paul felt that it was not appropriate to take John Mark along on their missionary trips because he had abandoned Paul and Barnabas during their first missionary trip. Later, though, Paul evidently recognized that Mark had applied himself and would be a valuable asset to him. So Paul said to Timothy: "Bring Mark along with you, for he is helpful to me in the ministry."—2 Tim. 4:11.

What about us? In imitating our merciful, patient, and loving heavenly Father,



Changing your mind may result  
in a blessing

we may find it appropriate to change our mind. For example, we may alter our opinion of others. Unlike Jehovah and Jesus, we are imperfect. If they were willing to change, could we not take into consideration extenuating circumstances of others and perhaps change our mind?

Changing our mind may be a good option when considering theocratic goals. Some who are studying the Bible and who have been attending congregation meetings for a while may put off getting baptized. Or some brothers may hesitate to enter the pioneer service, even though they are in a position to expand their ministry in that way. And certain brothers seem disinclined to reach out for congregation responsibilities. (1 Tim. 3:1) Can you personally identify with one of those cases? Jehovah lovingly invites you to experience

such privileges. So why not change your thinking and share in the joy of giving of yourself to God and to others?

Ella says about her service at a branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses in Africa: "When I first came to Bethel, I did not know if I would stay long. I had the desire to serve Jehovah whole-souled, but I also felt very attached to my family. At first, I missed my family so much! Yet, my roommate encouraged me, so I decided to stay. After spending ten years at Bethel, I feel that I want to continue as long as possible serving my brothers and sisters by remaining in my Bethel assignment."

### **When Changing Your Mind IS A MUST**

Do you remember what happened to Cain when he became jealous of his



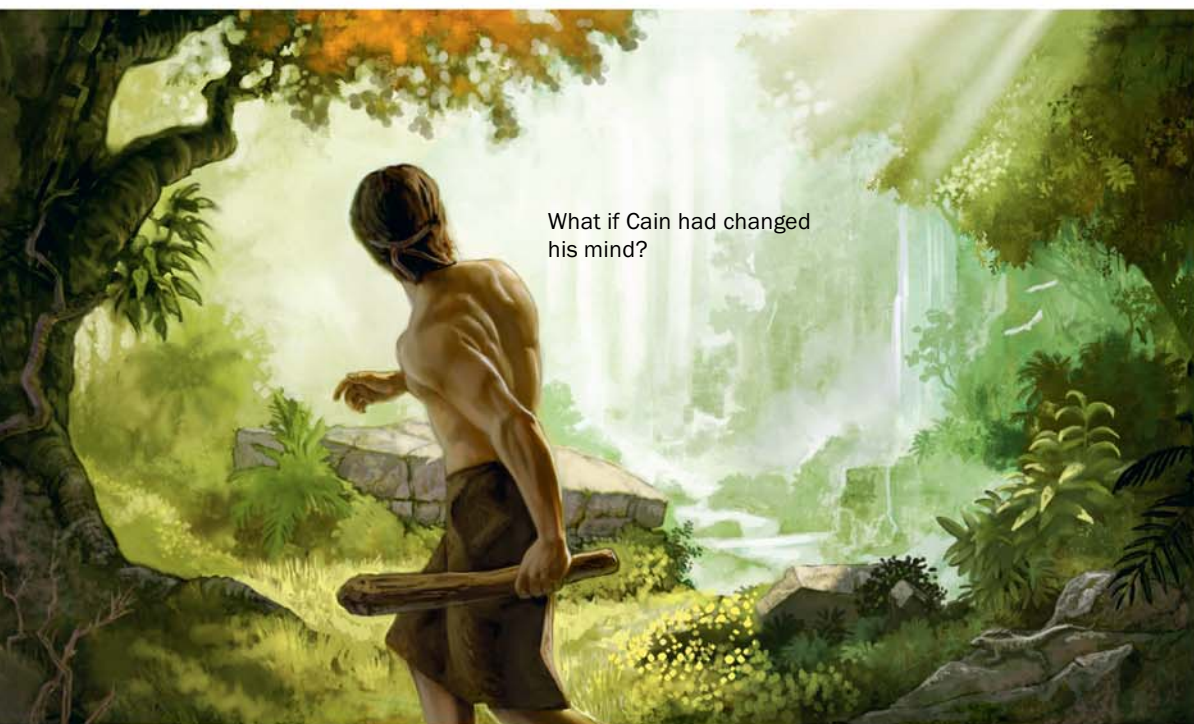
brother and grew hot with anger? God told this sullen man that he would be restored to favor if he would simply turn to doing good. God counseled Cain to get the mastery over the sin that was “crouching at the door.” Cain could have changed his attitude and his mind, but he chose to ignore God’s counsel. Sadly, Cain killed his brother and became the first human murderer!—Gen. 4:2-8.

Consider also the example of King Uzziah. At first, he was doing what was right in Jehovah’s eyes and continually searched for God. Sadly, though, Uzziah spoiled his good record by becoming haughty. He entered the temple to offer incense, though he was not a priest. When the priests warned him not to commit this presumptuous act, did he change his mind? No. Uzziah “became enraged” and ignored their warning.

As a result, Jehovah struck him with leprosy.—2 Chron. 26:3-5, 16-20.

Yes, there are times when we absolutely should change our mind. Here is a modern-day example. Joachim was baptized in 1955, but in 1978 he was disfellowshipped. Over 20 years later, he had a repentant attitude and he was reinstated as one of Jehovah’s Witnesses. Recently, an elder asked him why he waited so long before applying for reinstatement. Joachim replied: “I was both angry and proud. I do regret that I waited so long. While I was disfellowshipped, I knew that Jehovah’s Witnesses taught the truth.” He needed to change his attitude and repent.

We may find ourselves in a situation that requires that we change our mind and our course. May we be willing to do so in order to be pleasing in Jehovah’s eyes.—Ps. 34:8.





## *What did Jeremiah mean when he spoke of Rachel's weeping over her sons?*

■ At Jeremiah 31:15, we read: "This is what Jehovah says: 'A voice is heard in Ramah, lamentation and bitter weeping: Rachel is weeping over her sons. She has refused to be comforted over her sons, because they are no more.'"

Rachel's two sons did not die before she did. Consequently, what Jeremiah recorded 1,000 years after Rachel's death might seem to be inaccurate.

Rachel's first son was Joseph. (Gen. 30:22-24) Later, she had another son, who was named Benjamin. But Rachel died giving birth to that second son. Therefore, the question arises: Why does Jeremiah 31:15 say that she was weeping because her sons were "no more"?

It is noteworthy that the first son, Joseph, in time fathered Manasseh and Ephraim. (Gen. 41:50-52; 48:13-20) Later, Ephraim was the most prominent and influential tribe of the entire northern kingdom of Israel and came to represent all ten tribes. On the other hand, the tribe that descended from Rachel's second son, Benjamin, became part of the southern kingdom, along with Judah. In a sense, then, Rachel could be spoken of as a symbol of *all* the mothers of Israel, of the northern kingdom and the southern one.

By the time the book of Jeremiah was written, the northern ten-tribe kingdom had already fallen to the Assyrians and many of its people had been taken away captive. However, some of Ephraim's descendants may have fled to the territory of Judah. In 607 B.C.E., the Babylonians conquered the southern two-tribe kingdom of Judah. It appears that as part of that conquest, many captives were assembled at Ramah, some five miles (8 km) north of Jerusalem. (Jer. 40:1) Perhaps some were slaughtered there in the territory of Benjamin where Rachel was buried. (1 Sam. 10:2) So Rachel's weeping over her sons could imply

her figuratively mourning over the Benjamites in general or particularly those of Ramah. Another possibility is that it suggested that all the mothers of God's people wept over the death or exiling of Israel.

In any case, Jeremiah's expression concerning Rachel's weeping over her sons was prophetic of what happened centuries later when the life of young Jesus was in danger. King Herod commanded that all the boys up to two years old in Bethlehem, which was on the south side of Jerusalem, be put to death. Thus, those sons were no more; they were dead. Imagine the cries of grief from the mothers bereft of their sons! It was as if those cries could be heard as far as Ramah, on the north side of Jerusalem.—Matt. 2:16-18.

Consequently, both in Jeremiah's time and in Jesus' time, Rachel's weeping over her sons was fitting language to express the grief of Jewish mothers over their slain children. Of course, those who died and went to "the land of the enemy" death may return from the grip of that enemy when the dead are resurrected.—Jer. 31:16; 1 Cor. 15:26.





## Facing the End of This Old World Together

*“We are members belonging to one another.”—EPH. 4:25.*

### HOW WOULD YOU REPLY?

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What tendency do young people need to resist, and why?

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Why do we need to be “joined together” in unity?

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How can you personally show that you want to be among the “members belonging to one another”?

ARE you a young person? If so, be assured that you, as a part of Jehovah’s worldwide congregation, are really appreciated. In many countries, a large number of those getting baptized are young people. How encouraging it is to see so many youths joining the ranks of those who have decided to serve Jehovah!

<sup>2</sup> As a youth, do you enjoy being with other young people? Likely you do. A certain happiness comes from enjoying pleasant times with those of our own age. However, whether we are young or old and regardless of our background, God wants us to be united in worshipping him. The apostle Paul wrote that God’s will is that “all sorts of people should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth.” (1 Tim. 2:3, 4) At Revelation 7:9, we find the description of God’s worshippers who come out of “all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues.”

<sup>3</sup> What a contrast there is between young servants of Jeho-

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- 1, 2. What does God want for his worshippers, young and old alike?  
3, 4. (a) What spirit is common among many of today’s youths?  
(b) What attitude harmonizes with Ephesians 4:25?

vah and youths of this world! Many who do not serve Jehovah lead a self-centered way of life, focusing only on what they want. Some researchers call them “Generation Me.” By the way they talk and dress, they give evidence of disdain for the older generation, whom they view as not “with it.”

<sup>4</sup> That spirit is all around us. Thus, young servants of Jehovah find that it takes real effort to avoid it and to accept God’s view. Even in the first century, Paul found it necessary to urge fellow believers to avoid “the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience” and in which they “at one time walked.” (**Read Ephesians 2:1-3.**) Young ones who see the need to avoid that spirit and to work unitedly with all their brothers are to be commended. Such an attitude harmonizes with Paul’s statement that “we are members belonging to one another.” (Eph. 4:25) As we approach the end of this old world, working together unitedly will become ever more important. Let us consider some Bible examples that will help us to appreciate the need for sticking together, for being united.

### THEY STUCK TOGETHER

<sup>5</sup> In the past, Jehovah was pleased to protect his people when they unitedly helped one another to face distressing times. Modern-day servants of God, whether young or old, can learn from Bible examples. One such example involved Lot.

<sup>6</sup> Lot and his family were in a perilous situation because destruction was going to come on Sodom, the city where they lived. God’s angels urged Lot to leave

and to find safety in the mountainous region, saying: “Escape for your life!” (Gen. 19:12-22) Lot obeyed, and his two daughters cooperated with him in leaving the city. Sadly, others close to them did not. To the younger men who were engaged to Lot’s daughters, the older man “seemed to be joking.” That cost them their lives. (Gen. 19:14) Only Lot and his daughters, who stuck close to him, survived.

<sup>7</sup> Consider another example. When the Israelites left Egypt, they did not do so as various independent groups, each group going its own way. And when Moses “stretched out his hand over the sea” and Jehovah split the sea apart, Moses did not go through alone or with just a few of the Israelites. Rather, with Jehovah’s protection, the entire congregation passed through. (Ex. 14:21, 22, 29, 30) They displayed a spirit of unity, and they were accompanied by “a vast mixed company,” non-Israelites who sided with them. (Ex. 12:38) It is unimaginable that a few individuals, perhaps a group of young ones, would have gone off on their own, taking a route that they viewed as preferable. Would it not have been senseless to do so and miss out on Jehovah’s protection? —1 Cor. 10:1.

<sup>8</sup> In King Jehoshaphat’s day, God’s people faced a formidable enemy, “a large crowd” from surrounding areas. (2 Chron. 20:1, 2) Commendably, God’s servants did not try to conquer the enemy in their own strength. Instead, they turned to Jehovah. (**Read 2 Chronicles 20:3, 4.**) And they did not do

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5, 6. What lesson about sticking together is clear from the account of Lot and his daughters?

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7. How did Jehovah help those who displayed a spirit of unity when the Israelites left Egypt?

8. In Jehoshaphat’s day, how did God’s people manifest unity?

so independently, each as he saw fit or felt inclined. The Bible record tells us: “All those of Judah were standing before Jehovah, along with their little ones, their wives, and their children.” (2 Chron. 20:13) Whether young or old, they strove together in faith to follow Jehovah’s direction, and Jehovah protected them against their enemy. (2 Chron. 20:20-27) Is this not a fine example of how to face challenges as God’s people?

<sup>9</sup> The early Christians were also noted for working together. For instance, after many Jews and proselytes became Christians, they devoted themselves “to the teaching of the apostles, to associating together, to the taking of meals, and to prayers.” (Acts 2:42) This unity was especially evident during persecution, when they particularly needed one another. (Acts 4:23, 24) Do you not agree that during critical times, it is essential to work together?

### UNITE AS JEHOVAH’S DAY APPROACHES

<sup>10</sup> One of the darkest periods in human history nears. The prophet Joel describes it as “a day of darkness and gloom.” (Joel 2:1, 2; Zeph. 1:14) For God’s people, it will be a time for unity. Recall Jesus’ words: “Every kingdom divided against itself comes to ruin.” —Matt. 12:25.

<sup>11</sup> During the coming time of trouble for this system, we will have to be truly united. The spiritual unity that we will need to have among ourselves could be compared to the physical proximity of houses in ancient Jerusalem. Those

dwellings were built so close together that the psalmist described Jerusalem as “a city that is joined together as one.” That enabled the inhabitants to help and protect one another. Moreover, their physical closeness could well represent the spiritual unity of the whole nation when all “the tribes of Jah” assembled for worship. (**Read Psalm 122:3, 4.**) Today and in the critical days to come, we likewise need to remain “joined together as one.”

<sup>12</sup> Why will our being “joined together” be so important at that time? Ezekiel chapter 38 speaks prophetically of an attack by “Gog of the land of Magog” against God’s people. That will not be the time to let anything divide us. We will certainly not want to turn to the world for assistance. Rather, we will want to stick close to our brothers. Of course, we will not survive just because we are part of a group. Jehovah and his Son will bring those who call on Jehovah’s name safely through that calamitous time. (Joel 2:32; Matt. 28:20) Nevertheless, is it reasonable to think that those who have not maintained unity as part of God’s flock—those who have strayed off on their own—will be saved? —Mic. 2:12.

<sup>13</sup> Is it not clear, then, that it is unwise to follow the ways of youths who separate themselves into their own isolated world? We are approaching a time when we will really need one another. And that means all of us, young and old! Yes, now is the time to learn to work together, to cultivate the unity that will be so vital in the days ahead.

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9. What can we learn about oneness from the actions and attitude of the early Christians?

10. When will unity be particularly important?


11. What comparison found at Psalm 122:3, 4 could be applied to God’s people today? (See opening image.)

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12. What will help us to survive the coming attack on God’s people?

13. What lessons can God-fearing youths learn from what we have considered so far?





All of us can pray in  
behalf of our brothers  
(See paragraph 18)

### “MEMBERS BELONGING TO ONE ANOTHER”

<sup>14</sup> Jehovah is helping us “to serve him shoulder to shoulder.” (Zeph. 3:8, 9) He is training us to fit into his eternal purpose. What does that include? He purposes “to gather all things together in the Christ.” (**Read Ephesians 1:9, 10.**) Yes, he wants to unify all willing creatures throughout the universe, and he will succeed in doing this. Does that help you as a young person to see the need to work unitedly with Jehovah’s organization?

<sup>15</sup> Jehovah is teaching us to attain unity now, with the objective of having unity forever. Again and again, the Scriptures tell us to “have mutual concern for one another,” to “have tender affection for one another,” to “keep comforting one another,” and to be “building one another up.” (1 Cor. 12:25; Rom. 12:10; 1 Thess. 4:18; 5:11) Jehovah knows that Christians are imperfect, and this may make it challenging to be united, so we

need to work at “freely forgiving one another.”—Eph. 4:32.

<sup>16</sup> Jehovah also gives us Christian meetings to help us learn to stick together. We have often read the encouragement found at Hebrews 10:24, 25. One purpose of these meetings is to “consider one another so as to incite to love and fine works.” It is significant, though, that the meetings are provided so that we can be “encouraging one another, and all the more so as [we] see the day drawing near.”

<sup>17</sup> As a youth, Jesus set a good example of appreciation for such arrangements. At the age of 12, he was with his parents at a large spiritual gathering. At one point, he was missing but not because he had wandered off to associate with other youths. Instead, Joseph and Mary found him engaged in a spiritual discussion with teachers at the temple.—Luke 2:45-47.

<sup>18</sup> In addition to cultivating love for one another and using Christian

**14, 15.** (a) With what objective in mind is Jehovah training young and old today? (b) Jehovah gives what counsel to encourage us to be united?

**16, 17.** (a) What is one purpose of Christian meetings? (b) What can youths learn from Jesus’ example as a youth?

**18.** How can our prayers contribute to unity?

meetings to strengthen the bond of unity, we can pray for one another. By being specific in our requests to Jehovah in behalf of our brothers, we are reminded of our concern for one another. These are not things that only adult Christians can and should do. If you are a youth, do you take advantage of these avenues to develop a bond of closeness with your spiritual family? Doing so can help you to make certain that you are not tied to this old world when it suffers its demise.

### **SHOWING THAT “WE ARE MEMBERS BELONGING TO ONE ANOTHER”**

<sup>19</sup> Jehovah’s people already live in accord with the principle found at Romans 12:5: “We are members belonging to one another.” We can see proof of this when disasters strike. In December 2011, a tropical storm caused severe flooding on the Philippine island of Mindanao. Overnight, more than 40,000 homes were inundated, including dozens of our brothers’ homes. However, the branch office reports that “even before the relief committees were in operation, Christian brothers from other areas were sending help.”

<sup>20</sup> Similarly, when a massive earthquake and resulting tsunami struck eastern Japan, many brothers and sisters suffered great losses. Some were left with virtually nothing. Yoshiko, who lost her home, lived some 25 miles (40 km) from the Kingdom Hall. She reports: “Later, we were surprised to find that the day after the earthquake, the circuit overseer and another brother had come looking for us.” With a big smile,

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**19-21.** (a) In what outstanding way do we show that “we are members belonging to one another”? Give examples. (b) What lesson do you learn from how some brothers responded to disasters?

she adds: “We really appreciated having our spiritual needs cared for so abundantly through the congregation. In addition, we received coats, shoes, bags, and pajamas.” A member of the relief committee comments: “Brothers from all over Japan were acting as one, trying to help one another. Brothers even came all the way from the United States to help. When asked why they had come such a long way, they said, ‘We are united with our brothers in Japan, and they need help.’” Are you not proud to be part of an organization that cares so much for its members? You can be sure that Jehovah is highly pleased to see such a united spirit.

<sup>21</sup> Having that spirit now will help us to face future distresses with a united front even if we are cut off from brothers in some parts of the world. In fact, that spirit serves as training for difficulties that are very likely to confront us as this old system goes down. Fumiko, a typhoon victim in Japan, says: “The end is very close. We need to continue to assist our fellow believers as we look forward to the time when there will be no disasters.”

<sup>22</sup> Young and old who now learn to strive for unity are actually preparing to survive the end of this wicked, disunited world. As in times past, our God will deliver his people. (Isa. 52:9, 10) Bear constantly in mind that you can be among the delivered ones if you work at being part of God’s united people. Something else that will help is an increased appreciation for what we have already received. Our next article will consider that subject.

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**22.** What long-term benefit can come from Christian unity?



# Do You Appreciate What You Have Received?

*"We received . . . the spirit that is from God, so that we might know the things that have been kindly given us by God."—1 COR. 2:12.*

MANY people have heard this thought expressed: 'You don't appreciate what you have until it's gone.' Have you sometimes felt that way? When one has had things from childhood, there is a tendency not to appreciate them fully. For example, a person who grows up in a wealthy household may take for granted many of the things he has. This can be the case with youths who because of a lack of experience may not yet fully discern what things in life are truly valuable.

<sup>2</sup> If you are young, maybe in your teens or early 20's, what is important to you? For many in the world, life revolves around material things—a good salary, a nice home, or the latest high-tech devices. However, if these are our only concerns, something important is missing—spiritual riches. Sadly, millions today have not even begun to look for these. You young ones who have been raised by Christian parents must be careful not to lose sight of the value of what you

## HOW WOULD YOU REPLY?

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What do youths and the rest of us need to appreciate?

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What are some fine examples of those who appreciated their spiritual inheritance?

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How do you feel about what you have received?

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1. What common view is sometimes expressed?

2, 3. (a) Christian youths should be careful to avoid what? (b) What can help us to appreciate what we have?

have received in the form of a spiritual inheritance. (Matt. 5:3) A lack of appreciation could result in sad consequences that might affect you for the rest of your life.

<sup>3</sup> You, though, can prevent that from happening. What will help you to treasure your spiritual inheritance? Let us consider some Bible examples that can help us see why it is wise to value our spiritual inheritance. The examples we will consider can assist not only young people but every Christian to cherish what he or she has spiritually.

### THEY LACKED APPRECIATION

<sup>4</sup> We can find Bible accounts of some who received a rich spiritual heritage but failed to appreciate it. That was true in the family of one prophet, Samuel, who served Jehovah from a young age and had a fine record with God. (1 Sam. 12:1-5) Samuel set an example that his sons, Joel and Abijah, would have done well to imitate. However, they did not appreciate this, and they turned out to be bad. The Bible record tells us that unlike their father, they “perverted justice.”—**Read 1 Samuel 8:1-5.**

<sup>5</sup> It was similar with King Josiah’s sons. Josiah set a superb example in worshipping Jehovah. When the book of God’s Law was found and read to Josiah, he made an earnest effort to apply Jehovah’s instructions. He worked to eliminate idolatry and spiritism from the land, and he encouraged the people to obey Jehovah. (2 Ki. 22:8; 23:2, 3, 12-15, 24, 25) What a rich spiritual inheritance his sons received! Three of his sons and

one grandson in time became kings, but not one of them showed appreciation for what had been passed on to him.

<sup>6</sup> Josiah’s son Jehoahaz succeeded him as king, but he did “what was bad in Jehovah’s eyes.” He ruled for only three months before an Egyptian Pharaoh imprisoned him, and Jehoahaz died in captivity. (2 Ki. 23:31-34) Then his brother Jehoiaquim ruled for 11 years. He too lacked appreciation for what he had received from his father. Because of Jehoiaquim’s bad course, Jeremiah prophesied about him: “With the burial of a donkey he will be buried.” (Jer. 22:17-19) Josiah’s other successors—his son Zedekiah and his grandson Jehoiachin—were no better; neither chose to follow Josiah’s upright ways.—2 Ki. 24:8, 9, 18, 19.

<sup>7</sup> Solomon was a king who received much from his father, David. Though Solomon came from an outstanding spiritual background and started out well, he later lost appreciation for the right way. “In Solomon’s old age, his wives inclined his heart to follow other gods, and his heart was not complete with Jehovah his God like the heart of David his father.” (1 Ki. 11:4) Consequently, Solomon lost Jehovah’s favor.

<sup>8</sup> How sad to see that these men who had such a promising background and the opportunity to do what was right let it go to waste! Yet, not all young ones turned out that way in Bible times, nor do they today. Let us consider some positive examples of youths whom young Christians can imitate.

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4. What does 1 Samuel 8:1-5 reveal about Samuel’s sons?

5, 6. How did things turn out with Josiah’s sons and grandson?

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7, 8. (a) In what way did Solomon waste his spiritual heritage? (b) What lesson can we learn from Bible examples of ones who wasted their spiritual heritage?



## THEY APPRECIATED WHAT THEY HAD RECEIVED

<sup>9</sup> We find an excellent example in Noah's sons. Their father received the command to build an ark and to get his household into it. Noah's sons evidently appreciated the need to do Jehovah's will. They must have cooperated with their father. In time, they helped him build the ark, and then they went into it. (Gen. 7:1, 7) With what goal in mind? Genesis 7:3 says that they took animals into the ark "to preserve their offspring alive over all the earth." Humans too were saved. Because Noah's sons valued what they had received through their father, they had the privilege of helping to preserve the human race and re-establish true worship on a cleansed earth.—Gen. 8:20; 9:18, 19.

<sup>10</sup> Centuries later, four young Hebrew men showed that they had learned what was really important. Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah, and Daniel were taken to Babylon in 617 B.C.E. They were good-looking, intelligent young men who could easily have just blended into the Babylonian way of life. But they did not. It is apparent from their actions that they remembered their heritage, what they had been taught. The four were richly blessed for adhering to the spiritual lessons they had learned when they were young.—**Read Daniel 1:8, 11-15, 20.**

<sup>11</sup> Our consideration of good examples would not be complete without giv-

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9. How did Noah's sons set an excellent example? (See opening image.)

10. How did four young Hebrew men in Babylon show appreciation for the truths they had learned?

11. How did others benefit from Jesus' spiritual background?

ing attention to Jesus, God's Son. He received much from his Father, and he truly valued it. That appreciation for what he had been taught is evident in his words: "Just as the Father taught me, I speak these things." (John 8:28) And it was his desire that others benefit from what he had received. He told the crowds: "I must also declare the good news of the Kingdom of God to other cities, because for this I was sent." (Luke 4:18, 43) He helped his listeners to see the need for being "no part of the world," which in general does not value spiritual things.—John 15:19.

## APPRECIATE WHAT YOU HAVE RECEIVED

<sup>12</sup> Like the young men whom we have discussed, you too may have been raised by parents devoted to Jehovah God. If so, what the Scriptures say about Timothy may well fit your situation. (**Read 2 Timothy 3:14-17.**) It was from your parents that "you learned" about the true God and how to please him. Your parents may well have started teaching you from your infancy. This certainly has done much to make you "wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus" and to help you to be "completely equipped" for God's service. A key question now is, Will you show appreciation for what you have received? That may call on you to do some self-examination. Consider such questions as: 'How do I feel about being part of the long line of faithful witnesses? How do I feel about being among the relatively few on earth today who are known by God? Do I appreciate what a unique

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12. (a) How does 2 Timothy 3:14-17 apply to many youths today? (b) Christian youths should consider what questions?



How do you feel about being part of the long line of faithful witnesses?

(See paragraphs 9, 10, 12)

and grand privilege it is to know the truth?’

<sup>13</sup> Some youths brought up by Christian parents may not see the stark contrast between our current spiritual paradise and Satan’s dark world. Some have even been tempted to see what life in the world is like. But would you run in front of a moving car just to find out how painful—and possibly fatal—that could be? Of course not! Similarly, there is no need for us to experience the “decadent course of debauchery” in this world just to discover how excruciatingly distressing that can be.—1 Pet. 4:4.

<sup>14</sup> Gener, who lives in Asia, was raised in a Christian family. He got baptized at age 12. As a teenager, though, he became attracted to the ways of this world. He says: “I wanted to experience the ‘freedom’ the world offers.” Gener began to live a double life. By age 15, he had taken up some of the lifestyle of his bad companions. He was drinking and cursing like them. Gener often came home late, after playing billiards and vi-

olent computer games with his friends. However, as time passed, he began to realize that the attractions of this world were not truly satisfying. It was an empty way of life. He says about his coming back to the congregation: “There are many challenges that still confront me, but the blessings from Jehovah far outnumber them.”

<sup>15</sup> Of course, there are other young ones associated with the congregation who were not raised by Christian parents. If you are one of them, think what a wonderful privilege you are now enjoying because you know and serve the Creator! There are billions of people on the earth. Thus, it is a real blessing to be among those whom Jehovah has kindly drawn to himself and to whom he has revealed Bible truth. (John 6:44, 45) Only about 1 in every 1,000 people alive today has an accurate knowledge of the truth, and you are one of them. Should that not give all of us, no matter how we learned the truth, cause for rejoicing? **(Read 1 Corinthians 2:12.)** Gener says: “My hair stands on end when I think

**13, 14.** What temptation do some Christian youths face, but why would giving in to it be unwise? Give an example.

**15.** Even young ones not raised by Christian parents should reflect on what?

about it. Who am I to be known by Jehovah, the Owner of the universe?" (Ps. 8:4) A Christian sister from the same area said: "Students feel very proud just to be recognized by their teacher. How much more of a privilege it is to be known by Jehovah, the Grand Instructor!"

### WHAT WILL YOU DO?

<sup>16</sup> Considering what a marvelous privilege you have, why not become ever more determined to be among the relatively few who have done the right thing with their life? In that way, you can join a long line of faithful servants of God. That is so much wiser than merely following the majority of youths who, as if in a stupor, march along with this world toward destruction.—2 Cor. 4: 3, 4.

<sup>17</sup> That, of course, does not mean that being different from the world will always be easy. If you think about it, though, wisdom dictates that we be different. To illustrate: Think of an Olympic athlete. He no doubt had to be different to get to that level. He likely had to deny himself many things that would consume his time and attention, limiting how much he could train. On the other hand, his being willing to be different from his peers would allow him to train more and to reach his goal.

<sup>18</sup> The world's view of life is shortsighted. If you take a long-range view, being different from the world and abstaining from its morally and spiritually destructive activities, you will "get a firm hold on the real life." (1 Tim. 6:19)

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**16.** What is a wise choice for Christian youths today?

**17-19.** What can help you to have a balanced view of being different from the world?

The sister mentioned earlier says: "If you stand up for what you believe, you'll really feel great at the end of the day. It will prove that you've got the strength to go against the flow of Satan's world. Most of all, it's as if you can see Jehovah God being proud of you and smiling at you! That's when you feel good about being different!"

<sup>19</sup> Life is futile if a person is focused solely on what he can get now. (Eccl. 9: 2, 10) If you are a youth and you give serious thought to the purpose and possible duration of your life, is it not smart to avoid "walking just as the nations" do and instead live a truly meaningful life? —Eph. 4:17; Mal. 3:18.

<sup>20</sup> If we make the right decisions, we can have a satisfying life now and put ourselves in line to "inherit the earth"—to have everlasting life. There are so many wonderful blessings in store for us that we cannot even imagine them all. (Matt. 5:5; 19:29; 25:34) Granted, God does not give us things automatically. He requires something of us. **(Read 1 John 5:3, 4.)** But to serve him faithfully now is definitely worth it!

<sup>21</sup> What a great privilege it is to have received so much from God! We have accurate knowledge of his Word and a clear understanding of the truth about him and his purposes. We enjoy the privilege of bearing his name and being his Witnesses. God promises us that he is on our side. (Ps. 118:7) May all of us, whether young or old, show our appreciation by living our life in a way that manifests a keen desire to give Jehovah "the glory forever."—Rom. 11:33-36; Ps. 33:12.

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**20, 21.** If we make the right decisions, for what do we put ourselves in line, but what is expected of us?

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