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How to Cope Successfully With Anxiety

ANXIETY can be like a heavy weight on our heart. (Prov. 12:25) Have you experienced the crushing pressure of anxiety in your life? Do you ever feel that your emotions are at a breaking point? If so, you are not alone. Many of us may have become caregivers, lost a loved one in death, experienced a natural disaster, or faced some other situation that has drained us physically, mentally, and emotionally. But what can help us cope successfully with anxiety?*

We can learn much about how to cope with anxiety by considering the example of King David. He experienced many difficult situations in his life, even facing death at times. (1 Sam. 17:34, 35; 18:10, 11) How did David successfully cope with anxiety? How can we imitate his example?

HOW DAVID SUCCESSFULLY COPEd WITH ANXIETY

David faced multiple trials all at once. Consider, for example, a situation that arose while he was on the run from murderous King Saul. When David and his men returned from a military campaign, they were shocked to find that enemies had stolen their possessions, burned down their homes, and taken their families captive. How did David react? “David and the men with him began weeping loudly until they had no strength left to weep.” Adding to David’s distress, his trusted men were “talking of stoning him.” (1 Sam. 30:1-6) David now faced three major problems all at once: His family was in danger, he was afraid that

his men would kill him, and King Saul was still chasing him. Imagine the anxiety David must have felt!

What did David do next? He immediately “strengthened himself by Jehovah his God.” How may David have done this? David’s pattern was to pray to Jehovah for help and to reflect on how He had helped him in the past. (1 Sam. 17:37; Ps. 18:2, 6) David saw the need to seek Jehovah’s direction, so he inquired of Jehovah as to what he should do. After David received Jehovah’s direction, he acted immediately. As a result, he and his men were blessed by Jehovah and they recovered their families and possessions. (1 Sam. 30:7-9, 18, 19) Did you note the three actions David took? He **prayed** to Jehovah for help, **reflected** on Jehovah’s past dealings with him, and **acted on** Jehovah’s direction. How can we imitate David? Consider three ways.

IMITATE DAVID WHEN FACING ANXIETY

1. Pray. Anytime we begin to feel anxiety, we can pray to Jehovah for help and wisdom. We can unburden ourselves by lingering in prayer and pouring out our heart to him. Or we can say a brief, silent prayer if that is all our circumstances will allow at the moment. Every time we look to Jehovah for help, we echo David’s confidence: “Jehovah is my crag and my stronghold and the One who rescues me. My God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.” (Ps. 18:2) Does prayer really work? A pioneer sister named Kahlia says: “After praying, I feel at peace. Prayer helps me to align my thinking with Jeho-

* A person who experiences severe anxiety may need to seek medical help.



1. PRAY



2. REFLECT



3. ACT

vah's thinking, and my trust in him is heightened." Indeed, prayer is a powerful provision from Jehovah that helps us cope with anxiety.

2. Reflect. As you look back on your life, can you think of trials that you were able to endure only because of Jehovah's help? When we reflect on how Jehovah has sustained us as well as his servants in the past, we gain inner strength and greater confidence in him. (Ps. 18:17-19) "I have a list of answered prayers," says an elder named Joshua. "This has helped me to remember the times I asked Jehovah for something specific and he gave me just what I needed." Yes, when we ponder over what Jehovah has already done for us, we gain renewed strength to combat anxiety.

3. Act. Before we decide what to do in a situation, we can turn to God's Word for the most reliable guidance. (Ps. 19:7, 11) Many find that when they do research on a particular scripture, they are better able to understand how the verse applies in their life. An elder named Jarrod explains: "Doing research helps me to see all the aspects of a verse and understand what Jehovah is telling me. This sounds it down into my heart so that I can act on his guidance." When

we seek Jehovah's direction from the Scriptures and follow through on that direction, we are better equipped to deal with anxiety.

JEHOVAH WILL HELP YOU SUCCEED

David understood that to cope successfully with anxiety, he needed Jehovah's help. He appreciated Jehovah's support so much that he was moved to say: "By God's power I can scale a wall. The true God is the one who clothes me with strength." (Ps. 18:29, 32) We may feel that our trials are like unscalable walls. But with Jehovah's help, we can scale any wall-like trials! Yes, when we **pray** to Jehovah for help, **reflect** on all that he has done for us, and **act** on his direction, we can be confident that he will give us the strength and the wisdom we need to cope successfully with our anxieties!

SONG 90

Encourage One Another

PREVIEW

Jehovah has given us a wonderful gift—the gift of speech. Sadly, most people do not use this gift as Jehovah intended. What can help us keep our speech clean and up-building in a world where standards are deteriorating? How can we please Jehovah with our speech when engaging in the ministry, attending congregation meetings, and sharing in conversation with others? This article will discuss the answers to those questions.

Are You “an Example . . . in Speaking”?

“Become an example to the faithful ones in speaking.”

—1 TIM. 4:12.

OUR ability to speak is a gift from our loving God. As soon as the first human, Adam, was created, he could use words to communicate with his heavenly Father. He could also expand his vocabulary by coining new words. Adam used that ability to carry out his assignment of naming all the animals. (Gen. 2:19) And how thrilled he must have been when he spoke for the first time to another human—his beautiful wife, Eve!—Gen. 2:22, 23.

² The gift of speech was soon misused. Satan the Devil lied to Eve, and that lie led to human sin and imperfection. (Gen. 3:1-4) Adam misused his tongue when he blamed Eve—and even Jehovah—for his own mistakes. (Gen. 3:12) Cain lied to Jehovah after he killed his brother Abel. (Gen. 4:9) Later, a descendant of Cain named Lamech composed a poem that reflected the violence of the times in which he lived. (Gen. 4:23, 24) What is the situation today? We observe political leaders who freely use profanity in public. And it is difficult to find a motion picture that does not contain some bad language. Students hear profanity at school, and adults are exposed to it in the workplace. Sadly, the use of foul language is only a reflection of the deterioration in moral standards and in speech that we see in the world around us.

³ If not careful, we might get so used to hearing bad language that we begin to use it ourselves. Of course, as

1. Where did our ability to speak come from?
2. How has speech been misused in the past and at present?
3. What danger do we need to be aware of, and what will we consider in this article?

Christians, we want to please Jehovah, and that involves more than avoiding obscene speech. We want to use the remarkable gift of speech in a positive way—to praise our God. In this article, we will consider how we can do so (1) in the ministry, (2) at congregation meetings, and (3) in our daily conversations. But first, let us consider why our speech matters to Jehovah.

OUR SPEECH MATTERS TO JEHOVAH

4 Read Malachi 3:16. Can you think of a reason why Jehovah would record in his “book of remembrance” the names of those whose speech shows that they fear him and meditate on his name? Our speech reveals what is in our heart. Jesus said: “Out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.” (Matt. 12:34) What we choose to talk about reflects how much we love Jehovah. And Jeho-

4. According to Malachi 3:16, why does our speech matter to Jehovah?

vah wants those who love him to enjoy life forever in the new world.

5 The way we speak can determine whether Jehovah will accept our worship. (Jas. 1:26) Some of those who do not love God speak in an aggressive, harsh, and proud way. (2 Tim. 3:1-5) We certainly do not want to be like them. We are eager to please Jehovah with our speech. But could Jehovah be pleased with us if we used gracious and kind speech at our Christian meetings or in the ministry but spoke in a harsh and unloving way to family members behind closed doors?—1 Pet. 3:7.

6 When we use the gift of speech well, we identify ourselves as worshippers of Jehovah. We help those around us to see clearly the difference “between one serving God and one not serving him.”

5. (a) How is our worship connected with what we say? (b) As shown in the picture, what must we be aware of regarding our speech?

6. What good resulted from Kimberly's fine speech?



What does your speech reveal about what is in your heart?
(See paragraphs 4-5)



Speaking kindly to
people in the ministry
pleases Jehovah
(See paragraphs 8-9)

(Mal. 3:18) Consider how this proved to be true for a sister named Kimberly.* She was assigned to work with a classmate on a high-school project. After working together, the classmate noticed that Kimberly was different from other students. She did not criticize people behind their back, she spoke in a positive way, and she did not use profanity. Kimberly's classmate was intrigued and eventually agreed to a Bible study. How pleased Jehovah is when we speak in a way that attracts people to the truth!

⁷ We all want to speak in a way that brings honor to Jehovah and draws us closer to our brothers. So let us now consider some practical ways in which we can continue to be “an example . . . in speaking.”

BECOME AN EXAMPLE IN THE MINISTRY

⁸ *Speak with kindness and respect when provoked.* During his ministry, Jesus was falsely accused of being a man who was a drunkard, a glutton, an agent of the

* Some names have been changed.

7. What are you motivated to do with your God-given gift of speech?

8. What example did Jesus set for us in how he used his speech in the ministry?

Devil, a Sabbath breaker, and even a blasphemer of God. (Matt. 11:19; 26:65; Luke 11:15; John 9:16) Yet, Jesus did not retaliate with angry words. Like Jesus, we should never retaliate even if spoken to harshly. (1 Pet. 2:21-23) Of course, showing such restraint is not easy. (Jas. 3:2) What can help?

⁹ Try to look beyond the response of a householder who speaks negatively. A brother named Sam says, “I try to focus on the householder’s need to hear the truth and his potential to change.” Sometimes a householder is angry simply because we came at a bad time. When we are confronted by someone who is upset, we can do what a sister named Lucia does. We can say a brief prayer, asking Jehovah to help us remain calm and hold back from saying anything unkind or disrespectful.

¹⁰ *Become a more effective teacher.* Timothy was an experienced Christian minister, but even he needed to continue to make spiritual improvement. **(Read 1 Timothy 4:13.)** How can we become more effective teachers in the min-

9. What can help us control our speech when we are in the preaching work?

10. According to 1 Timothy 4:13, what goal should we have?

istry? We must prepare well. Thankfully, we have a variety of tools that can help us become better teachers. You will find it useful to consult the brochure *Apply Yourself to Reading and Teaching* and the “Apply Yourself to the Field Ministry” section of the *Our Christian Life and Ministry—Meeting Workbook*. Are you taking advantage of these resources? When we prepare well, we feel less nervous and speak with more confidence.

¹¹ We can also become better teachers by observing others in the congregation and learning from them. Sam, quoted previously, asks himself what it is that makes some Christians good teachers. He studies their methods and then tries to imitate them. A sister named Talia pays close attention to the way experienced speakers develop public talks. By doing so, she has learned how to speak about and reason on subjects that often come up in the ministry.

BECOME AN EXAMPLE AT THE MEETINGS

¹² We can all contribute to the success of our congregation meetings by raising

11. How have some Christians become better teachers?

12. What challenges do some face?

our voices in song and by giving well-prepared comments. (Ps. 22:22) Some find it a challenge to sing or to give a comment in public. Do you? If so, you will be interested to know what has helped others overcome their fears.

¹³ **Sing wholeheartedly.** When we sing our Kingdom songs, our primary focus should be on our desire to praise Jehovah. A sister named Sara does not consider herself to be a very good singer. Yet, she wants to praise Jehovah in song. To that end, she finds it helpful to prepare for the songs at home, just as she would prepare for other parts on the meeting. She rehearses the songs and tries to identify how the lyrics tie in with the subject being discussed. “This helps me to focus more on the words and less on my singing ability,” she says.

¹⁴ **Comment regularly.** Admittedly, this can be a real challenge for some. “I have social anxiety, even though others don’t notice it because my voice is generally calm,” explains Talia, quoted earlier. “So commenting is very difficult for me.” Yet, Talia does not hold back from

13. What might help you sing wholeheartedly at the meetings?

14. If you are timid, what can help you comment at meetings?



Singing wholeheartedly at meetings praises Jehovah
(See paragraphs 12-13)



Changing a negative conversation into positive speech gains us Jehovah's favor
(See paragraph 19)

giving comments. As she prepares for the meeting, she keeps in mind that the first comment on a subject should be a brief and direct answer to the question. She says: “This means that it is OK if my answer is short, simple, and to the point because that is the kind of answer the conductor is looking for anyway.”

¹⁵ Even Christians who are not particularly shy or timid may at times hold back from commenting. Why? A sister named Juliet explains, “Sometimes I hesitate to comment because I fear that my comment is too simple and not good enough.” Remember, though, that Jehovah wants us to give the best comments we can give.* He greatly appreciates our determination to praise him at congregation meetings and not to allow our fears to hold us back.

BECOME AN EXAMPLE IN DAILY CONVERSATIONS

¹⁶ ***Avoid all forms of “abusive speech.”*** (Eph. 4:31) As mentioned earlier, pro-

* For more information about commenting, see the article “Praise Jehovah in the Congregation” in the January 2019 issue of *The Watchtower*.

15. What should we remember about our comments?

16. What kind of speech must we avoid?

fanity has no place on a Christian's lips. But there are subtle forms of abusive speech that we also need to be on guard against. For example, we need to be careful not to make unfavorable comparisons when talking about people of other cultures, tribes, or nationalities. Further, we never want to hurt others with cutting remarks. One brother admits: “At times, I have made cutting, sarcastic remarks that I thought were funny and innocent but in reality were made at the expense of someone's feelings. Over the years, my wife has helped me immensely by pointing out in private when my speech was tasteless and hurtful to her and others.”

¹⁷ ***Speak in a way that builds others up.*** Be quick to commend rather than to criticize or complain. (**Read Ephesians 4:29.**) The Israelites had much to be thankful for, yet they routinely complained. A complaining spirit can be contagious. You will recall that a negative report from ten spies caused “all the Israelites . . . to murmur against Moses.” (Num. 13:31–14:4) On the other hand, commendation can be a power-

17. In harmony with Ephesians 4:29, how can we build others up?

ful force for good. We can be sure that the commendation Jephthah's daughter received from her female companions greatly encouraged her to stick to her assignment. (Judg. 11:40) Sara, quoted previously, says, "When we offer commendation, we make others feel that they are loved by Jehovah and that they have a place in his organization." So look for opportunities to offer sincere commendation.

¹⁸ **Speak truthfully.** We cannot please Jehovah if we are untruthful. He hates all forms of lying. (Prov. 6:16, 17) Although many people today consider lying to be a normal part of speech, we stick to Jehovah's view on the matter. **(Read Psalm 15:1, 2.)** Of course, we avoid telling outright lies, but we also avoid deliberately giving the wrong impression to others.

¹⁹ **Avoid spreading harmful gossip.** (Prov. 25:23; 2 Thess. 3:11) Juliet, quoted above, explains how negative gossip affects her. She says: "Listening to negative gossip is discouraging, and it causes

18. Based on Psalm 15:1, 2, why must we speak truthfully, and what does this include?

19. What further caution should we keep in mind?

me to lose trust in the person who is gossiping. After all, how do I know that he or she will not gossip about me to someone else?" If you see that a conversation is turning into harmful gossip, steer the discussion toward something positive.—Col. 4:6.

²⁰ Since we live in a world where bad speech is rampant, we must work hard to ensure that our speech pleases Jehovah. Remember, speech is a gift from Jehovah, and he cares how we use it. He will bless our sincere efforts to use our speech in a positive way in the ministry, at the meetings, and in our daily conversations. When the influence of this ungodly system of things finally comes to an end, it will be much easier to honor Jehovah with our speech. (Jude 15) In the meantime, be determined to please Jehovah with "the words of [your] mouth."—Ps. 19:14.

20. What are you determined to do with your speech?

PICTURE DESCRIPTION Page 5: A brother reacts harshly to an angry householder; a brother holds back from singing in the congregation; and a sister engages in harmful gossip.

HOW CAN WE BECOME EXAMPLES IN SPEAKING . . .

■ in the ministry?

■ at the meetings?

■ in our daily conversations?

SONG 37

Serving Jehovah
Whole-Souled

PREVIEW

All of us can benefit from observing the examples set by others. But there are dangers we must avoid. This article will help us maintain our joy and avoid the trap of becoming either proud or discouraged when we consider what others are able to accomplish.

Find Joy in Giving Jehovah Your Personal Best

“Let each one examine his own actions.”—GAL. 6:4.

JEHOVAH wants us to be happy. We know this because joy is an aspect of the fruitage of his holy spirit. (Gal. 5: 22) Since there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving, we feel a deep sense of joy when we are fully engaged in the Christian ministry and are helping our brothers in various ways.—Acts 20:35.

² As recorded at **Galatians 6:4**, the apostle Paul mentions two factors that will help us remain joyful. (**Read.**) First, our goal should be to give Jehovah *our* best. If we are giving him *our* very best, we should be happy. (Matt. 22:36-38) Second, we should avoid comparing ourselves with others. Whatever our health, training, or natural ability enables us to accomplish, we should be grateful to Jehovah. After all, we have received everything we have from him. On the other hand, if others are more effective in some aspect of the ministry than we are, we should rejoice that they are using their talents to praise Jehovah, not to promote themselves or to further their own interests. So rather than compete with them, we should learn from them.

³ In this article, we will see how we can cope when we feel limited in what we can do in our service. We will also consider how we can best use any gifts we may have and what we can learn from the examples of others.

1. What gives us a deep sense of joy?

2-3. (a) As indicated at Galatians 6:4, what two factors will help us remain joyful in Jehovah's service? (b) What will we consider in this article?

WHEN WE FEEL LIMITED

⁴ Some of Jehovah's servants have a hard time adjusting to the limitations brought on by advancing age or poor health. That was the case with Carol. She once had the privilege of serving where the need was greater. During that time, she conducted 35 Bible studies and helped several progress to dedication and baptism. Carol had a productive ministry! Then her health failed, and she became confined mostly to her home. "I know that because of my physical limitations, I am unable to do what others can do," Carol says, "but I feel that I am not as faithful as they are. This is a battle between desire and reality, and it is very hard to endure." Carol wants to do all she can for Jehovah. Indeed, that is very commendable! We can be sure that our compassionate God appreciates her fine spirit.

⁵ If you are sometimes discouraged by a limitation, ask yourself, 'What does Jehovah require of me?' Your best—whatever that may be right now. Consider this scenario: A sister in her 80's feels discouraged because she cannot do as much in the ministry as she did when she was in her 40's. She thinks that even though she is giving her best, it is not pleasing to Jehovah. But is that really the case? Think about it. If this sister gave her best in her 40's and she is still giving her best in her 80's, she has

never stopped giving her best. If we begin to feel that our service is somehow not enough to please Jehovah, we need to remind ourselves that Jehovah is the one who sets the standard for what pleases him. If we do our best, Jehovah will in effect say to us: "Well done!"—Compare Matthew 25:20-23.

⁶ We will find it easier to be joyful if we focus on what we *can* accomplish instead of on what we cannot do. Consider a sister named Maria, who suffers from a disease that limits how much she can do in the ministry. At first, she was depressed and felt useless. But then she took note of a sister in the congregation who was bedridden, and Maria decided to help. "I made arrangements to preach with her by telephone and by letter," says Maria. "Every time we worked together, I came home feeling happy and satisfied that I had been able to help my sister." We too can increase our joy when we focus on what we can do rather than on what we cannot do. But what if we can do more or we do especially well in some areas of Jehovah's service?

IF YOU HAVE A GIFT—"USE IT"!

⁷ In his first inspired letter, the apostle Peter urged his brothers to use whatever gifts and talents they had to build up their fellow believers. Peter wrote: "To the extent that each one has received a gift, *use it* in ministering to one another as fine stewards of God's undeserved kindness." (1 Pet. 4:10) We should not hold back from using our gifts to the

4. What situation can lead to discouragement? Give an example.

5. (a) What should we remember if our limitations discourage us? (b) As seen in the pictures, how has the brother consistently given his best in Jehovah's service?

6. What can we learn from Maria's example?

7. What practical counsel did the apostle Peter give Christians?

Doing our best at every stage of our life pleases Jehovah
(See paragraphs 4-6)



fullest for fear that others may become jealous or get discouraged. If we were to do that, we would not be giving Jehovah our personal best.

⁸ We need to use our gifts to the full, but we must be careful that we do not boast about them. (**Read 1 Corinthians 4:6, 7.**) For example, you may be particularly successful in starting home Bible studies. You should not hold back from using that gift! But it is one thing to use the gift and quite another to brag about it. Suppose you recently had an exciting experience in the ministry that resulted in a study being started. You are eager to tell your service group all about it. When you meet up with the group, though, a sister is relating an experience she had that resulted in placing a magazine. She placed a magazine; you started a study. What will you do? You know that the group will be encouraged by your experience, but you might decide to wait for another appropriate occasion to relate it, so as not to dampen the joy of your sister who placed the magazine.

8. According to 1 Corinthians 4:6, 7, why should we avoid boasting about our gifts?

That would be a kindness. But by all means do not stop offering Bible studies. You have a gift—use it!

⁹ Let us remember that any natural abilities we may have are gifts from God. We should use those gifts to build up the congregation, not to promote ourselves. (Phil. 2:3) When we use our energy and abilities to do God's will, we will have cause for rejoicing—not because we are outdoing others or proving ourselves superior to them, but because we are using our gifts to bring praise to Jehovah.

¹⁰ If not careful, a person might fall into the trap of comparing his strength with another person's weakness. For example, a brother may give excellent public talks. That is his strength. In his heart, though, he may look down on a brother who struggles with giving talks. But that brother may excel in showing hospitality, training his children, or being zealous in the ministry. How grateful we are that we have so many talented

9. How should we use our gifts?

10. Why is it unreasonable to compare ourselves with others?



brothers and sisters who use their gifts to serve Jehovah and help others!

LEARN FROM THE EXAMPLES OF OTHERS

¹¹ Although we should avoid comparing ourselves with others, we can benefit by learning from the examples of faithful ones. To illustrate, let us consider Jesus. Even though he was perfect, we can learn from his beautiful qualities and ways. (1 Pet. 2:21) When we do our best to follow his example as closely as we can, we become better servants of Jehovah and more effective in our ministry.

¹² In God’s Word, we find many examples of faithful men and women who despite being imperfect are worthy of imitation. (Heb. 6:12) Think of King David, whom Jehovah called “a man agreeable to my heart” or, as another Bible version renders it, “the kind of person who pleases me most.” (Acts 13:22) Yet, David was not perfect. In fact, he made some serious mistakes. In spite of that,

11. Why should we try to follow Jesus’ example?
12-13. What can we learn from King David?

he is a good example for us. Why? Because when he was corrected, he did not try to justify himself. Instead, he accepted the strong counsel he received and was sincerely sorry for what he had done. As a result, Jehovah forgave him. —Ps. 51:3, 4, 10-12.

¹³ We can learn from David by asking ourselves: ‘How do I respond to counsel? Do I quickly acknowledge my mistakes, or do I try to justify myself? Am I quick to blame others? Do I try hard not to repeat my mistakes?’ You can ask yourself similar questions as you read about other faithful men and women in the Bible. Did they deal with challenges similar to the ones you are facing? What commendable qualities did they display? In each case, ask yourself: ‘How can I be more like this loyal servant of Jehovah?’

¹⁴ We can also benefit by observing fellow believers, both young and old. For instance, can you think of someone in your congregation who is faithfully enduring a trial—perhaps peer pressure, family opposition, or poor health? Do

14. How can we benefit by observing fellow believers?

you see in this person commendable traits that you would like to cultivate to a greater degree? By considering his or her good example, you may learn practical ways to endure your own trials. How grateful we are to have such living examples of faith to imitate—truly a cause for rejoicing!—Heb. 13:7; Jas. 1:2, 3.

BE HAPPY IN YOUR SERVICE TO JEHOVAH

¹⁵ To promote peace and unity in the congregation, each one of us needs to give his personal best. Consider the first-century Christians. They had a variety of gifts and assignments. (1 Cor. 12:4, 7-11) But this was not a cause for competition and divisions. Rather, Paul urged each one to supply what was needed “to build up the body of the Christ.” Paul wrote to the Ephesians: “When each respective member functions properly, this con-

15. What counsel did the apostle Paul give that can help us continue rejoicing in our service to Jehovah?

tributes to the growth of the body as it builds itself up in love.” (Eph. 4:1-3, 11, 12, 16) Those who did so promoted peace and unity—traits that we observe in our congregations today.

¹⁶ Be determined to avoid comparing yourself with others. Instead, learn from Jesus, and strive to imitate his qualities. Benefit from Bible examples and modern-day examples of faith. As you continue to do your best, be confident that Jehovah “is not unrighteous so as to forget your work.” **(Read Hebrews 6:10.)** Continue to rejoice in serving Jehovah, knowing that he appreciates your whole-souled efforts to please him.

16. What should we be determined to do? (Hebrews 6:10)

PICTURE DESCRIPTION Pages 12-13: A brother served at Bethel when he was a young man. He then got married and pioneered with his wife. After his children came along, he trained them in the ministry. Now in his old age, he continues to do his best, witnessing by letter.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- | | | |
|--|---|--|
| ■ Why do we need to avoid comparing ourselves with others? | ■ Why can we rejoice in serving Jehovah even when our circumstances limit what we can do? | ■ How can we benefit from the good examples of others? |
|--|---|--|



Biscuits for the Terriers

“IN THE spring of 2014, I began walking my two small dogs in the downtown section of our community,” wrote Nick, who lives in Oregon, U.S.A. “The Witnesses were usually at the city center, standing beside their literature carts. They were well-dressed, and they greeted one and all with a warm smile.

“The Witnesses were kind not just to people but to my dogs as well. One day, Elaine, who was standing next to the cart, offered some biscuits to my two terriers. After that, it wasn’t long before the dogs were pulling on their leashes in an attempt to get to the ‘biscuit corner.’

“Months came and went. The dogs enjoyed their biscuits, and I enjoyed brief conversations with the Witnesses. But I was hesitant to get too friendly. I was over 70 years of age, and I wasn’t sure what the Witnesses believed. Having been disappointed with Protestant churches, I thought it best to study the Bible on my own.

“During this time, I saw other Witnesses in different parts of the city, standing beside their carts. They too were always

pleasant. They were committed to giving Bible-based answers to questions, and as a result, my trust in them grew.

“One day, Elaine asked, ‘Do you believe that animals are a gift from God?’ I replied, ‘Yes, I definitely do!’ Elaine then shared Isaiah 11:6-9 with me. It was a turning point, even though I was still hesitant about accepting literature.

“In the days that followed, I enjoyed brief but meaningful discussions with Elaine and her husband, Brent. They suggested that I read Matthew through Acts to understand what is involved in being Christlike. So I did. Not long after, I accepted a Bible study with Brent and Elaine. That was in the summer of 2016.

“I looked forward to my weekly Bible study and the meetings at the Kingdom Hall. I felt blessed and happy to be learning what the Bible really says. A little over a year later, I became a baptized Witness. Now at the age of 79, I know I am on the correct path. Jehovah has blessed me by including me in his family of dedicated servants.”

SONG 137

Faithful Women,
Christian Sisters

PREVIEW

This article examines how Christian mothers can benefit from the example of Timothy's mother, Eunice, and help their own children come to know and love Jehovah.

Mothers—Learn From the Example of Eunice

“Do not forsake the instruction of your mother. [It is] an attractive wreath for your head and a fine ornament for your neck.”—PROV. 1:8, 9.

ALTHOUGH the Bible does not describe Timothy's baptism, it is not hard to imagine the joy that his mother, Eunice, felt that day. (Prov. 23:25) Picture her eyes beaming with pride as Timothy stands waist-deep in water. She smiles while Lois, Timothy's grandmother, holds her close. Eunice gasps softly and holds her breath as Timothy disappears beneath the water. With a loud splash, he reappears with a triumphant grin on his face, and she can no longer hold back her tears. Eunice has successfully met the challenge of teaching her son to love Jehovah and his Son, Jesus Christ. What difficulties did she have to overcome to get to this point?

² Timothy was raised in a religiously divided household. His father was a Greek, and his mother and grandmother were Jews. (Acts 16:1) Timothy was likely a teenager when Eunice and Lois embraced a different religion—Christianity. Still, the household remained divided. Which path would Timothy take? He was probably old enough to make his own decision. Would he take sides with his unbelieving father? Would he cling to the Jewish traditions he had been taught from childhood? Or would he accept this newfound faith in Jesus Christ?

³ Christian mothers today likewise love their family.

1-2. (a) Who was Eunice, and what challenge did she face as a mother? (b) Comment on the cover picture.

3. According to Proverbs 1:8, 9, how does Jehovah view the work that mothers do to help their children become his friends?

More than anything, they want to help their children to develop a close friendship with Jehovah. And our God highly values their efforts. **(Read Proverbs 1:8, 9.)** Jehovah has guided countless mothers as they helped their children to accept the truth.

⁴ Naturally, a mother may at times wonder if her children will choose to serve Jehovah, as Timothy did. After all, parents know how much pressure their children face in Satan's world. (1 Pet. 5:8) Additionally, many mothers have the challenge of raising their children without a husband or with a husband who does not worship Jehovah. For example, a sister named Christine* says: "My husband was a good father and family man, but he strongly opposed my raising our children as Jehovah's Witnesses. I shed many tears over the years, wondering how my children could ever come to worship Jehovah."

⁵ If you are a Christian mother, you can be successful, as Eunice was. In this article, we will discuss how you can imitate her example in teaching your children by what you *say* and what you *do*. We will also see how Jehovah will help you.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN BY WHAT YOU SAY

⁶ When Timothy was a little boy, his mother did her best to acquaint him with "the holy writings," as the Jews under-

stood them. Of course, her knowledge was limited because she knew nothing about Jesus Christ. Still, what Timothy learned from the Scriptures provided him with a good basis to accept Christianity. But would he? As a young man, he had the right to choose whether he would live his life as a Christian. No doubt Timothy was "persuaded to believe" the truth about Jesus partly because of his mother's efforts. **(Read 2 Timothy 3:14, 15.)** How grateful Eunice must have been that she had successfully met the challenge of teaching her son about Jehovah! Eunice truly lived up to her name, which comes from a word meaning "conquer."

⁷ Baptism was an important step in Timothy's life, but Eunice's worries were not over. How would her son use the rest of his life? Would he get involved with bad association? Would he go to school in Athens and accept the teachings of the pagan philosophers there? Would he slave for riches, wasting his time, energy, and youth? Eunice could not make decisions for Timothy, but she could help him. How? She could continue to work hard to instill in her son deep love for Jehovah and gratitude for His Son. Challenges are not unique to those living in religiously divided households. Even when both parents are in the truth, it can be difficult to touch the heart of young ones so that they will become faithful servants of Jehovah. What can parents learn from Eunice's example?

* Some names have been changed.

4. What challenges do mothers face today?

5. What will we discuss in this article?

6. As indicated at 2 Timothy 3:14, 15, how did Timothy become a Christian?

7. How could Eunice help her son to progress after his baptism?

⁸ **Study the Bible with your children.** Sisters, if your husband is in the truth, Jehovah wants you to help him care for the spiritual needs of your children. One way you can do this is by regularly supporting the Family Worship session. Speak positively about the arrangement, and consider what you can do to create a warm and enjoyable atmosphere. Perhaps you can help your husband plan a special Bible study project or activity. In addition, if some of the children are old enough to benefit from a personal Bible study in the *Enjoy Life Forever!* book, perhaps you can work along with your husband to provide the needed assistance.

⁹ Some mothers have to take the lead in studying the Bible with their children, either because they are single parents or because their husband is not a believer. If that is the case in your household, do not be overly anxious. Jehovah will help you. Use the effective teaching tools that he has provided through his organization to study with your children. Why not consult other experienced parents for fresh ideas on how to use these tools for family worship?* (Prov. 11:14) Jehovah can also aid you in communicating with your children. Ask him to help you draw out what is on their mind and in their heart. (Prov. 20:5) A simple ques-

* For example, see lesson 50 in the *Enjoy Life Forever!* book and the article "Ideas for Family Worship and Personal Study" in the August 15, 2011, issue of *The Watchtower*, pp. 6-7.

8. How can a mother help her believing husband to care for their children's spiritual needs?

9. Where can a mother who has an unbelieving husband find help?

tion such as 'What is your greatest challenge at school?' can lead to a productive conversation.

¹⁰ **Create opportunities to teach your children about Jehovah.** Talk about Jehovah and the many good things he has done for you. (Deut. 6:6, 7; Isa. 63:7) This is especially important if you cannot study regularly with your children at home. Christine, quoted earlier, says: "Opportunities to discuss spiritual things were so few that I took advantage of any moment we had. We would go for walks or pile into a canoe and paddle out from the shore to talk about Jehovah's wonderful creation and about many spiritual things. As soon as my children were old enough, I encouraged them to study the Bible on their own." In addition, speak positively about Jehovah's organization and about your brothers and sisters. Do not criticize the elders. What you say about them can determine whether your children will turn to them in times of need.

¹¹ **Promote peace at home.** Regularly express your love for your husband and your children. Speak about your husband in a kind and respectful way, and train your children to do the same. When you do this, you create a peaceful atmosphere that is conducive to learning about Jehovah. **(Read James 3:18.)** Consider the example of Jozsef, who serves as a special pioneer in Romania. While he was growing up, his father made it very difficult for him, his moth-

10. In what other way can you help your children to learn about Jehovah?

11. According to James 3:18, why is it important to promote peace at home?

er, and his siblings to serve Jehovah. Jozsef says: “My mother tried hard to create a peaceful home for us. The harsher my father was, the kinder my mother was. When she noticed that we had a hard time respecting and obeying our father, she would discuss Ephesians 6:1-3 with us. Then she would talk to us about Father’s good qualities and help us understand why we should cherish him. She defused many tense situations this way.”

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN BY WHAT YOU DO

¹² **Read 2 Timothy 1:5.** Eunice set a good example for Timothy. She must have taught him that true faith involves action. (Jas. 2:26) Timothy could no doubt see that his mother’s actions were motivated by her strong love for Jehovah. Timothy surely saw that serving Jehovah made his mother happy. What effect did Eunice’s example have on Timothy? As the apostle Paul noted, Timothy shared his mother’s faith. This was no coincidence. Timothy had observed her example and was moved to imitate it. Similarly today, many mothers have reached the heart of family members “without a word.” (1 Pet. 3:1, 2) You can do the same. How?

¹³ ***Make your relationship with Jehovah your priority.*** (Deut. 6:5, 6) Like most mothers, you make many sacrifices. You give up time, money, sleep, and other things to care for your children’s physical needs. But you should

never be so busy caring for those needs that you sacrifice your relationship with Jehovah. Regularly set aside time for private prayer, personal study of the Bible, and congregation meetings. By doing so, you will strengthen yourself spiritually and set a good example for your family as well as for others.

¹⁴ Consider a few examples of young ones who learned to love Jehovah and trust in him by observing their mother. Christine’s daughter Leanne says: “We couldn’t study openly. But Mother was very faithful when it came to attending the meetings. Her example and conviction made up for whatever we lacked in knowledge. We knew that this was the truth long before we ever attended meetings.”

¹⁵ Maria, whose father at times punished the family for attending meetings, says: “My mother is one of the most courageous sisters I know. As a child, I sometimes refused to do things because I was afraid of what others would say. But seeing how courageous she was and how she always put Jehovah first in her life helped me overcome my fear of man.” João, whose father forbade the family to have spiritual discussions at home, says: “Perhaps what touched me the most was that Mother was willing to give up everything—except her love for Jehovah—to please my father.”

¹⁶ Mothers, remember that your example affects others. How so? Consider

12. According to 2 Timothy 1:5, what effect did Eunice’s example have on Timothy?

13. Why should a mother make her relationship with Jehovah her priority?

14-15. What do you learn from the examples of Leanne, Maria, and João?

16. What effect can a mother’s example have on others?



Helping a child to grow spiritually takes time. Do not give up!

(See paragraph 17)

the effect that Eunice’s example had on the apostle Paul. He recognized that Timothy’s unhypocritical faith “dwelled first in . . . Eunice.” (2 Tim. 1:5) When did Paul first observe Eunice’s faith? It was likely during his first missionary tour that he met Lois and Eunice at Lystra, and he may have helped them to become Christians. (Acts 14:4-18) Just think: When Paul wrote to Timothy—some 15 years later—Paul still remembered Eunice’s faithful actions and used her as an example worthy of imitation! Obviously, she had made a lasting impression on the apostle and likely on many other first-century Christians. If you are raising your children without a mate or in a re-

ligiously divided household, be assured that your faithful example strengthens and motivates those around you.

¹⁷ What if it seems that your child is not responding to your efforts? Remember that training a child takes time. As shown in the picture, when you plant a seedling, you may at times wonder if it will ever grow into a plant that produces fruit. Although you cannot control the outcome, you continue to water it in order to give it the best opportunity to grow. (Mark 4:26-29) Likewise, as a mother, you may sometimes wonder if you are reaching the heart of your

17. What should you do if it seems that your child is not responding to your training?

young ones. You cannot control the outcome. But if you continue to do all that you can to train them, you give them the best possible opportunity to grow spiritually.—Prov. 22:6.

RELY ON JEHOVAH'S HELP

¹⁸ Since Bible times, Jehovah has helped countless young ones to become his friends. (Ps. 22:9, 10) He can also help your children to grow spiritually if that is their desire. (1 Cor. 3:6, 7) Even if your children seem to stray, Jehovah will keep a loving eye on them. (Ps. 11:4) When they show the slightest sign of being “rightly disposed,” he will be there, reaching out to them. (Acts 13:48; 2 Chron. 16:9) He may help you say the right thing at the right time—when your children need to hear it the most. (Prov. 15:23) Or he may move

18. How can Jehovah help your children to grow spiritually?

a caring brother or sister in the congregation to take a special interest in them. Even after your children become adults, Jehovah may bring back to their mind something that you taught them in the past. (John 14:26) You give Jehovah much to bless when you continue to train your children by word and by example.

¹⁹ Jehovah's love for you does not depend on the choices that your children make. He loves you because *you* love him. If you are a single parent, Jehovah promises to be a Father to your children and a Protector for you. (Ps. 68:5) You cannot control whether your children make the right choice or not. But if you continue to rely on help from Jehovah and do your best, you will gain his approval.

19. Why can you be sure that you have Jehovah's approval?

HOW CAN MOTHERS . . .

- | | | |
|--|---|---------------------------|
| ■ teach their children by what they say? | ■ teach their children by what they do? | ■ rely on Jehovah's help? |
|--|---|---------------------------|

SONG 84

Reaching Out

PREVIEW

Timothy was a well-qualified minister of the good news. Yet, the apostle Paul encouraged him to keep making spiritual progress. By following Paul's counsel, Timothy would become more useful to Jehovah and more helpful to his brothers and sisters. Are you, like Timothy, eager to serve Jehovah and fellow believers more fully? No doubt you are. What goals will help you to do so? And what is involved in setting and reaching those goals?

How to Set and Reach Spiritual Goals

“Ponder over these things; be absorbed in them, so that your advancement may be plainly seen by all people.”—1 TIM. 4:15.

AS TRUE Christians, we love Jehovah very much. We want our service to him to be of the best possible quality. If we are going to reach our full potential, though, we need to set spiritual goals, such as cultivating Christian qualities, learning useful skills, and looking for ways to serve others.*

² Why should we be interested in making spiritual progress? Primarily, we want to please our loving heavenly Father. Jehovah is happy when he sees us use our talents and abilities to the full in his service. In addition, we want to make spiritual progress so that we can be more helpful to our brothers and sisters. (1 Thess. 4:9, 10) No matter how long we have been in the truth, we all can make spiritual progress. Let us see how we can do just that.

³ When the apostle Paul wrote his first letter to Timothy, that fine young man was already an experienced elder. Yet, Paul encouraged him to keep making spiritual advancement. **(Read 1 Timothy 4:12-16.)** As you give thought to Paul's words, you will notice that he wanted Timothy to make progress in two ways: by cultivating

* **EXPRESSION EXPLAINED:** **Spiritual goals** include anything we work hard to achieve so that we can serve Jehovah more fully and make him happy.

1. What kind of spiritual goals can we set?
2. Why should we set spiritual goals and work hard to reach them?
3. As recorded at 1 Timothy 4:12-16, what did the apostle Paul encourage Timothy to do?

such Christian qualities as love, faith, and chasteness and by improving in such skills as public reading, exhortation, and teaching. With Timothy's example in mind, let us see how setting reasonable goals can help us make spiritual improvement. We will also consider some ways we can expand our ministry.

CULTIVATE CHRISTIAN QUALITIES

4 What made Timothy a useful servant of Jehovah? His outstanding Christian qualities. (**Read Philippians 2:19-22.**) From Paul's description of Timothy, we can see that he was humble, loyal, diligent, and dependable. He had a loving disposition, and he cared deeply about the brothers. As a result, Paul loved Timothy and did not hesitate to entrust him with challenging assignments. (1 Cor. 4:17) Similarly, we endear ourselves to Jehovah and are more useful to the congregation when we cultivate qualities that he loves.—Ps. 25:9; 138:6.

4. According to Philippians 2:19-22, what made Timothy a useful servant of Jehovah?

5 *Choose a specific goal.* Prayerfully consider which aspects of your personality need improvement. Select one specific quality that you would like to focus on. For instance, could you cultivate greater empathy or a stronger desire to support fellow worshippers? Do you need to be more peaceable and forgiving? You may find it helpful to ask a trusted friend to suggest ways you could improve.—Prov. 27:6.

6 *Work to reach your goal.* How can you do that? One way is by carefully studying the quality you want to improve. Suppose you decide to work on being more forgiving of others. You might begin by reading about and meditating on Bible examples of those who freely forgave others and those who did not. Consider Jesus' example. He willingly forgave others. (Luke 7:47, 48) He also looked past their faults and

5. (a) How can you go about setting the goal of cultivating a Christian quality? (b) As shown in the picture, how is the younger sister working on her goal to show more empathy toward others?

6. How can you work to reach your goal of cultivating a quality?



Identify a Christian quality that you would like to cultivate further
(See paragraphs 5-6)

saw their potential. By contrast, the Pharisees in Jesus' day "considered others as nothing." (Luke 18:9) After meditating on these examples, ask yourself: 'What do I see in others? Which of their qualities do I choose to focus on?' If you are struggling to forgive someone, try writing down as many of that individual's good qualities as you can. Then ask yourself: 'How does Jesus view this person? Would he forgive him?' Such a study project could help to readjust our thinking. At first, we may have to work hard to forgive someone who has offended us. But if we keep working at it, in time we will become more willing to forgive.

LEARN USEFUL SKILLS

⁷ Another goal you can set is to learn a useful skill. Consider the vast number of workers needed to build Bethel facilities, Assembly Halls, and Kingdom Halls. Many of these workers acquired their skills by working alongside brothers who are experienced tradesmen. As shown in the picture, both brothers and sisters are learning the skills that are needed to help maintain Assembly Halls and Kingdom Halls. In these and other ways, Jehovah God, "the King of eternity," and Christ Jesus, "the King of . . . kings," are accomplishing marvelous things by means of capable workers. (1 Tim. 1:17; 6:15; **read Proverbs 22:29.**) We want to work hard and use our skills to glorify Jehovah, not ourselves. —John 8:54.

7. In harmony with Proverbs 22:29, in what ways does Jehovah use skillful workers today?

⁸ **Choose a specific goal.** What skill could you focus on? Ask your congregation elders and perhaps your circuit overseer what skill they think you could develop. If, for example, they suggest that you improve your speaking and teaching ability, ask them to help you identify a specific speech quality that you need to work on. Then take practical steps to make improvements. How can this be accomplished?

⁹ **Work to reach your goal.** Suppose you wanted to improve your ability to teach. You could carefully study the brochure *Apply Yourself to Reading and Teaching*. When you are assigned a part on the midweek meeting, you could ask a qualified brother to listen to your presentation beforehand and provide suggestions for improvement. Earn a reputation not just for being skilled but also for being diligent and dependable. —Prov. 21:5; 2 Cor. 8:22.

¹⁰ What if the skill you want to develop involves something that you are not naturally good at? Do not give up! A brother named Garry struggled with a reading disability. He remembers how embarrassed he felt when trying to read aloud at congregation meetings. But he kept applying himself. He now says that because of the training he received, he is able to give talks at Kingdom Halls, circuit assemblies, and conventions!

8. How can you go about setting the goal of learning a skill?

9. How can you work to reach your goal of learning a skill?

10. Give an example of how to make progress in developing a skill.



Offer to learn how to do maintenance work on your Kingdom Hall
(See paragraph 7)

¹¹ Did Timothy become a notable speaker or an outstanding teacher? The Bible does not say. But no doubt Timothy became progressively more effective in carrying out his responsibilities as he followed Paul's advice. (2 Tim. 3:10) Likewise, if we develop our skills, we will be equipped to take on added responsibilities.

LOOK FOR WAYS TO SERVE OTHERS

¹² All of us benefit from the service of others. When we are in the hospital, we are grateful to receive a visit from elders who serve on Hospital Liaison Committees or on Patient Visitation Groups. When we are facing a difficult situation in our personal life, we appreciate it when a caring elder takes the time to listen to us and provide us comfort. When we need help with a Bible study, we are pleased when an experienced pioneer agrees to sit in on the

study and offers suggestions. All these brothers and sisters are happy to help us. We can share that joy if we make ourselves available to serve our brothers. "There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving," said Jesus. (Acts 20:35) If you want to expand your service in these or similar ways, what will help you to reach your goals?

¹³ Beware of setting a goal that is too general. For example, you may think, 'I would like to do more in the congregation.' But it may be difficult to know how to achieve such a goal, and you may find it impossible to know when you have achieved it. So choose a clear, specific goal. You might even write down the goal and how you plan to reach it.

¹⁴ We also need to be flexible when setting goals. Why? Because we do not have complete control over our circumstances. To illustrate: The apostle Paul

11. Like Timothy, what will help us to take on added responsibilities?

12. How have you benefited from the service of others?

13. When setting a personal goal, what should we keep in mind?

14. Why do we need to be flexible when setting goals?

Choose a specific goal that is within your reach
(See paragraph 18)



had helped to form a new congregation in the city of Thessalonica. And he no doubt had the goal of staying there and helping those new Christians. But opposers forced Paul to leave that city. (Acts 17:1-5, 10) If Paul had stayed, he would have put his brothers at risk. But Paul did not give up. Instead, he adapted to the changed circumstances. Later, he dispatched Timothy to care for the spiritual needs of the new believers in Thessalonica. (1 Thess. 3:1-3) How happy the Thessalonians must have been that Timothy had made himself available to serve wherever he was needed!

¹⁵ We can learn from Paul's experience in Thessalonica. We may be reaching out for a privilege of service, but circumstances beyond our control are preventing us from receiving it. (Eccl. 9:11) If that is true in your case, be willing to pick a different goal that is within your reach. This is what a couple named Ted and Hiedi did. Because of a health problem, they had to leave Bethel. But their love for Jehovah moved them to look for other ways to expand their ministry.

15. How might circumstances beyond our control affect our goals? Illustrate.

First, they took up the regular pioneer service. In time, they were appointed as special pioneers, and Ted was trained as a substitute circuit overseer. Then the age requirement for circuit overseers changed. Ted and Hiedi realized that they were no longer eligible for this privilege of service. Although they were disappointed, they recognized that they could serve Jehovah in other ways. Ted says, "We have learned not to limit our focus to one type of service."

¹⁶ We cannot control everything that happens in our life. Therefore, it is important that we do not measure our value by the privileges of service that we enjoy or compare our privileges with those that others enjoy. Hiedi explains, "Your peace disappears if you compare your life with what you see happening in the lives of others." **(Read Galatians 6:4.)** It is important that we look for ways in which we can be useful.*

¹⁷ Make yourself available for privi-

* See "Serving Where the Need Is Greater" in the book *Organized to Do Jehovah's Will*, chapter 10, pars. 6-9.

16. What lesson can we learn from Galatians 6:4?

17. How can you work toward qualifying for privileges of service?

leges of service by keeping your life simple and avoiding unnecessary debt. Set intermediate goals that will help you reach your long-term goals. For example, if your long-term goal is to become a regular pioneer, could you serve as a continuous auxiliary pioneer at present? If your goal is to serve as a ministerial servant, could you spend more time in field service and visiting the sick and elderly in your congregation? The experience you gain now may open the door to further privileges of service in the future. Be determined to do your best in any assignment you are given.—Rom. 12:11.

¹⁸ We are never too old to set and reach spiritual goals. Consider the example of a 75-year-old sister named Beverley. She had a severe health problem that made it hard for her to walk. But she longed to have a full share in the Memorial campaign. So she set specific goals. When Beverley reached her goals

18. As illustrated in the picture, what do you learn from Beverley's example?

for the campaign, she was very happy. Her efforts motivated others to exert themselves in the ministry. Jehovah values the work of our older brothers and sisters, even if circumstances limit what they can do.—Ps. 71:17, 18.

¹⁹ Set goals that are within your reach. Cultivate qualities that will endear you to Jehovah. Learn skills that will allow you to be more useful to our God and his organization. Look for ways to serve your brothers and sisters more fully.* Like Timothy, with Jehovah's blessing "your advancement may be plainly seen by all people."—1 Tim. 4:15.

* See lesson 60, "Continue Making Progress," in the *Enjoy Life Forever!* book.

19. What are some spiritual goals that we can set?

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS **Page 25:** A brother trains two sisters to do maintenance work, and they put their new skill to good use. **Page 26:** A homebound sister is successful at telephone witnessing, inviting people to the Memorial.

HOW CAN YOU SET AND REACH THE GOAL OF . . .

- cultivating a Christian quality?
- learning a useful skill?
- serving your brothers and sisters more fully?

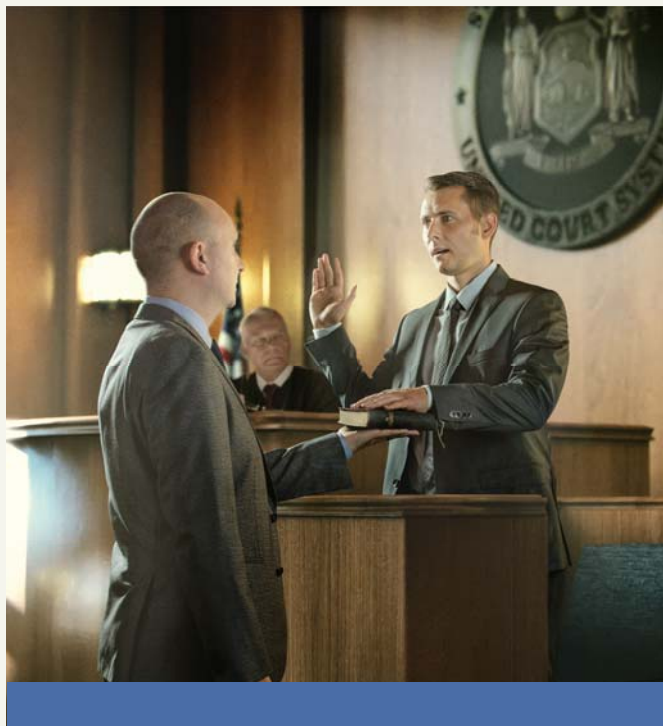
What does the Bible say about the taking of oaths?

■ An oath has been defined as “a solemn, formal declaration or promise to fulfill a pledge, often calling on God . . . as witness.” It may be oral or written.

Some may think that it is wrong to take an oath because Jesus said: “Do not swear [an oath] at all . . . Just let your word ‘Yes’ mean yes, your ‘No,’ no, for what goes beyond these is from the wicked one.” (Matt. 5:33-37) Of course, Jesus knew that the Mosaic Law required certain oaths and that faithful servants of God had made sworn oaths. (Gen. 14:22, 23; Ex. 22:10, 11) He also knew that Jehovah himself swore oaths. (Heb. 6:13-17) So Jesus could not have meant that we should never take an oath. Rather, he was warning against taking oaths that are trivial or meaningless. We should view the keeping of our word as a sacred duty. We must mean what we say.

What, then, should you do if you are asked to swear an oath? First, make sure you can do what you swear to do. If you are not sure, it would be best that you not take the oath. God’s Word warns: “Better for you not to vow than to vow and not pay.” (Eccl. 5:5) Next, consider Scriptural principles that relate to the oath, and then act in harmony with your trained conscience. What are some of these Scriptural principles?

Some oaths are compatible with God’s will. For example, Jehovah’s Witnesses exchange vows when being joined in marriage. These vows are a type of oath. Before God and eyewitnesses, the bride and the groom promise that they will love, cherish, and respect each other and that they will do so “for as long as [they] both may



live.” (Other couples may not say these exact words when they marry, but they still make a vow before God.) They are then pronounced husband and wife, and their marriage is meant to be a lifelong bond. (Gen. 2:24; 1 Cor. 7:39) This arrangement is proper, fitting, and in harmony with God’s will.

Some oaths are in conflict with God’s will. A true Christian would not take such an oath as to defend a country with arms or to renounce faith in God. Doing so would violate God’s commandments. Christians are to be “no part of the world,” so we cannot get involved in its controversies and conflicts.—John 15:19; Isa. 2:4; Jas. 1:27.

Some oaths are a matter of conscience. At times, we may need to evaluate an oath carefully in the light of Jesus’ counsel to

“pay back Caesar’s things to Caesar but God’s things to God.”—Luke 20:25.

Suppose, for example, that a Christian applies for citizenship or for a passport and he learns that he is required to take an oath of allegiance. If in that country such an oath means swearing to act in a way clearly contrary to God’s law, his Bible-trained conscience would not allow him to take it. The government, however, may allow him to modify the wording of the oath to accommodate his conscience.

Taking a modified oath of allegiance may be in harmony with the principle found at Romans 13:1, which says: “Let every person be in subjection to the superior authorities.” So the Christian may decide that there is nothing objectionable about swearing to do something that God already obligates one to do.

Conscience also plays a role if you are asked to use an object or to make a gesture while swearing an oath. The ancient Romans and Scythians swore by their swords, invoking the power of a war god as a guarantee of the person’s trustworthiness. The Greeks raised a hand to heaven when taking an oath. They thus recognized that there is a divine power who observes what is said and what is done and to whom humans are accountable.

Of course, a servant of Jehovah would not swear on any national emblem connected to false worship. But what if you are asked in a court of law to place your hand on a Bible and swear to give truthful testimony? In that case, you may decide to do so, since the Scriptures tell of faithful ones who accompanied an oath with a gesture. (Gen. 24:2, 3, 9; 47:29-31) It is important to remember that if you take such an oath, you are swearing before God that you will tell the truth. You need to be prepared to answer truthfully any question that may be asked of you.

Because we treasure our relationship with Jehovah, we should prayerfully consider any oath we are asked to take, making sure that it will not violate our conscience or Bible principles. If you decide to take an oath, you must be sure to keep it.—1 Pet. 2:12.

Bible Principles to Consider

- **Matthew 5:37:** “Let your word ‘Yes’ mean yes, your ‘No,’ no.”
- **John 15:19:** “You are no part of the world.”
- **Deuteronomy 5:9:** “Jehovah your God . . . requires exclusive devotion.”
- **Romans 13:1:** “Be in subjection to the superior authorities.”
- **Luke 20:25:** “Pay back Caesar’s things to Caesar but God’s things to God.”
- **1 Peter 2:12:** “Maintain your conduct fine among the nations, so that . . . they may be eyewitnesses of your fine works.”

If a Christian divorces his wife without Scriptural grounds and then marries another person, how does the congregation view the previous marriage and the new marriage?

■ In such a situation, the congregation would view the previous marriage as having ended when the man remarried and would view the new marriage as binding. To understand the reasons for this conclusion, let us consider what Jesus said about divorce and remarriage.

As recorded at Matthew 19:9, Jesus identified the only Scriptural basis to end a marriage. He stated: “Whoever divorces his wife, *except on the grounds of sexual immorality*, and marries another *commits adultery*.” From Jesus’ words, we learn (1) that sexual immorality is the only Scriptural basis for ending a marriage in divorce and (2) that a man who divorces his wife without that Scriptural basis and marries another commits adultery.*

Do Jesus’ words mean that a man who commits sexual immorality and divorces his wife is Scripturally free to remarry? Not necessarily. When adultery occurs in a marriage, *the innocent mate* decides whether she will forgive her husband or reject him. If she rejects him and a legal divorce is obtained, both are free to remarry once the divorce is final.

On the other hand, the innocent mate may have a sincere desire to preserve the marriage and thus express her willingness to forgive her husband. What, though, if the adulterous husband rejects his wife’s offer of forgiveness and obtains a unilateral legal

divorce? Because she is willing to forgive him and continue the marriage, he would not be Scripturally free to remarry. If he persists in an unscriptural course and marries another person when he is not Scripturally free to do so, he commits adultery again, which would make him subject to further congregation judicial action.—1 Cor. 5: 1, 2; 6:9, 10.

When a man who is not Scripturally free remarries, how does the congregation view the previous marriage and the new marriage? Does the previous marriage still continue intact from a Scriptural standpoint? Can the innocent mate still decide to forgive

“Whoever divorces his wife, *except on the grounds of sexual immorality*, and marries another *commits adultery*.”—Matt. 19:9

or to reject her former husband? Would the new marriage be viewed as adulterous?

In the past, the congregation viewed the new marriage as adulterous as long as the innocent mate was alive, remained unmarried, and was not guilty of sexual immorality. However, Jesus did not mention the innocent mate when he discussed divorce and remarriage. Rather, he explained that a man who obtains a divorce without a Scriptural basis and then marries another, commits adultery. In such a case, the divorce and remarriage, which Jesus equated with adultery, end the previous marriage.

* For simplicity, we will refer to the adulterous mate as a male and the innocent mate as a female. However, as recorded at Mark 10:11, 12, Jesus made it clear that his counsel on this matter applies equally to men and women.



When a marriage ends as the result of divorce and remarriage, forgiveness or rejection on the part of the innocent mate is no longer possible. Thus, she would not be burdened with the responsibility of deciding whether to forgive or reject her former husband. Further, the congregation's view of the new marriage would not depend on whether the innocent mate subsequently died, remarried, or was guilty of sexual immorality.*

In the example considered above, the husband committed adultery, which led to divorce. What if the husband had not committed adultery but got a divorce and then remarried? Or what if the husband had not committed sexual immorality before the divorce but did so after the divorce and then remarried despite his wife's willingness to

forgive him? In all these examples, the divorce and remarriage, which constitutes adultery, would end the previous marriage. The new marriage constitutes a legally binding relationship. As stated in the November 15, 1979, issue of *The Watchtower*, page 32, “now he has entered a new marriage and so cannot simply end it and return to the way things were before; the former marriage ended with the divorce, adultery and remarriage.”

This adjusted view does not undermine the sacredness of marriage or minimize the seriousness of adultery. A man who divorces his wife without Scriptural grounds and then marries another person without being Scripturally free to do so would be subject to judicial action on the charge of adultery. (If the new marriage mate is a Christian, she would also be subject to judicial action on the charge of adultery.) Although the new marriage would not be viewed as adulterous, the man would not qualify for special privileges of service in the congregation for many years and not before living down any notoriety or reproach associated with his wrongdoing. This would include taking into consideration the current circumstances of the previous mate who may have been dealt with treacherously and any minor children who may have been abandoned by the guilty mate.—Mal. 2:14-16.

In view of the serious consequences of unscriptural divorce and remarriage, Christians wisely cultivate Jehovah's view by upholding the sanctity of the marriage arrangement.—Eccl. 5:4, 5; Heb. 13:4.

* This adjusts our previous understanding that such a marriage would be viewed as adulterous until the innocent mate died, remarried, or was guilty of sexual immorality.

IN THIS ISSUE

How to Cope Successfully With Anxiety	2
Study Article 15: June 6-12	4
Are You “an Example . . . in Speaking”?	
Study Article 16: June 13-19	10
Find Joy in Giving Jehovah Your Personal Best	
Biscuits for the Terriers	15
Study Article 17: June 20-26	16
Mothers—Learn From the Example of Eunice	
Study Article 18: June 27–July 3	22
How to Set and Reach Spiritual Goals	
QUESTIONS FROM READERS	28

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