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SONG 29

Living Up to Our Name

PREVIEW

To qualify for baptism, we must be willing to make changes in our personality. This article will help us to see **what** traits make up the old personality, **why** we need to strip off those traits, and **how** we can do it. The next article will examine how we can continue putting on the new personality even after we get baptized.

You Can “Strip Off the Old Personality”

“Strip off the old personality with its practices.”—COL. 3:9.

WHAT was your life like before you began studying the Bible with Jehovah’s Witnesses? Many of us would be frightened to think about it. Our outlook and personality were likely shaped by the values of this system of things—by the world’s standards of right and wrong. If so, we “had no hope and were without God in the world.” (Eph. 2:12) A Bible study changed all of that!

² As you studied the Bible, you discovered that you have a heavenly Father who loves you very much. You realized that if you wanted to please Jehovah and become part of his family of worshippers, you would have to make significant changes in your lifestyle, outlook, and thinking. You would have to learn to live by his high standards.—Eph. 5:3-5.

³ Our Creator and heavenly Father, Jehovah, has the right to determine how members of his family should behave. And he requires that before we get baptized, we put forth effort to “strip off the old personality with its practices.”* **(Read Colossians 3:9, 10.)** This article will help those who want to get baptized to answer three questions: (1) What is “the old personality”? (2) Why does Jehovah urge us to strip it off? (3) How can we do

* **EXPRESSION EXPLAINED:** To “strip off the old personality” means to get rid of attitudes and tendencies that displease Jehovah. That should begin before baptism.—Eph. 4:22.

1. What was your life like before you began studying the Bible?
2. What did you discover as you studied the Bible?
3. According to Colossians 3:9, 10, what does Jehovah want us to do, and what will we discuss in this article?

so? For those of us who are already baptized, this study will help us to prevent characteristics of the old personality from reappearing.

WHAT IS “THE OLD PERSONALITY”?

⁴ A person who is controlled by “the old personality” generally thinks and acts in a fleshly way. He may be selfish, prone to anger, unthankful, and proud. He may enjoy viewing pornographic material and watching immoral or violent movies. No doubt he has some good qualities, and he may feel guilty about the bad things he says or does. But he lacks the motivation to change his thinking and conduct.—Gal. 5:19-21; 2 Tim. 3:2-5.

⁵ We are imperfect, so none of us can completely remove all bad thoughts and

4. How does a person act when he is controlled by “the old personality”?

5. What reasonable view should we have when it comes to stripping off the old personality? (Acts 3:19)

desires from our heart and mind. At times, we will do or say something that we will regret. (Jer. 17:9; Jas. 3:2) But when we strip off the old personality, fleshly attitudes and practices no longer control us. They no longer identify who we are as a person.—Isa. 55:7; **read Acts 3:19.**

⁶ Jehovah urges us to get rid of wrong thinking and bad habits because he loves us very much and wants us to enjoy life. (Isa. 48:17, 18) He knows that those who give in to wrong desires hurt themselves and those around them. It pains him to see us hurt ourselves and others.

⁷ Some of our friends and family may at first ridicule us for trying to make changes to our personality. (1 Pet. 4:3, 4) They may say that we have the right to do whatever we want and that we should not allow others to tell us what

6. Why does Jehovah urge us to strip off the wrong thinking and bad habits of the old personality?

7. According to Romans 12:1, 2, what choices do we have?



When we strip off
“the old personality,”
fleshly attitudes and
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control us
(See paragraph 5)

to do. But those who reject Jehovah's standards are not actually being independent. In reality, they are allowing the world dominated by Satan to mold them. **(Read Romans 12:1, 2.)** We all face a choice: Either we keep our old personality, which is shaped by sin and Satan's world, or we allow Jehovah to transform us into the best person we can be at present.—Isa. 64:8.

HOW CAN YOU “STRIP OFF” THE OLD PERSONALITY?

⁸ Jehovah knows that it will take time and effort for us to avoid wrong thinking and bad habits. (Ps. 103:13, 14) However, through his Word, his spirit, and his organization, Jehovah gives us the wisdom, strength, and support that we need to change who we are. No doubt he has already helped you. Let us now consider some of the practical steps you can take that will allow you to make further progress in stripping off the old personality and qualifying for baptism.

⁹ *Use the Bible to examine yourself closely.* God's Word acts like a mirror; it can help you to analyze the way that you think, speak, and act. (Jas. 1:22-25) Your Bible teacher and other mature Christians can offer you guidance. For instance, they can use the Scriptures to help you identify your strengths and your weaknesses. They can teach you how to find Bible-based information that offers practical advice on how to overcome bad habits. And Jehovah is always ready to come to your aid. He

knows best how to help you; he knows what is in your heart. (Prov. 14:10; 15:11) So get into the habit of praying to him and studying his Word each day.

¹⁰ *Be convinced that Jehovah's standards are best.* We can benefit from everything that Jehovah asks us to do. Those who live by his standards gain self-respect, a purpose in life, and genuine happiness. (Ps. 19:7-11) In contrast, those who ignore Jehovah's standards suffer the consequences that come from practicing the works of the flesh. Note what a man named Elie says about rejecting God's standards. He was raised by parents who love Jehovah. But while in his teens, Elie chose bad associates. He was drawn into a lifestyle that included drug abuse, immorality, and theft. Elie says that he found himself becoming increasingly angry and violent. “Basically, I did everything that I had been taught not to do as a Christian,” he admits. However, Elie did not forget what he had learned in his youth. Eventually, he began studying the Bible again. He worked hard to get rid of his bad habits and got baptized in 2000. How has living by Jehovah's standards benefited him? Elie says: “I now have peace of mind and a clean conscience.”* As this experience shows, those who reject Jehovah's standards hurt themselves. Even then, Jehovah is willing to help them to change.

¹¹ *Learn to hate what Jehovah hates.*

* For more details, see the article “The Bible Changes Lives—‘I Needed to Return to Jehovah,’” published in the April 1, 2012, issue of *The Watchtower*.

8. What help can we count on to avoid wrong thinking and bad habits?

9. What can God's Word help you to do?

10. What did you learn from Elie's experience?

11. What things does Jehovah hate?



Doing something that Jehovah says is bad should be as repulsive as eating rotten food (See paragraphs 11-12)

(Ps. 97:10) The Bible reveals that Jehovah hates “haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood.” (Prov. 6:16, 17) He also “detests violent and deceptive people.” (Ps. 5:6) Jehovah hates these attitudes and actions so much that he wiped out all the wicked in Noah’s day because they had filled the earth with violence. (Gen. 6:13) Consider another example. Through the prophet Malachi, Jehovah said that He hates those who treacherously scheme to divorce their innocent marriage partner. God rejects their worship and will call them to account for their conduct. —Mal. 2:13-16; Heb. 13:4.

¹² Jehovah wants us to “abhor what is wicked.” (Rom. 12:9) The word “abhor” describes a strong emotional response; it means to hate something intensely, to be disgusted by it. Imagine the strong response you would have if you were asked to eat a plate of rotten food. The very thought might make you feel sick. In a similar way, even the thought of do-

ing something that Jehovah says is bad should be repulsive to us.

¹³ **Safeguard your thinking.** Our thoughts influence our actions. That is why Jesus taught us to reject thoughts that can lead us to commit a serious sin. (Matt. 5:21, 22, 28, 29) We want to be pleasing to our heavenly Father, do we not? How important it is, then, that we immediately reject any bad thoughts that come to our mind!

¹⁴ **Control your speech.** Jesus said: “Whatever comes out of the mouth comes from the heart.” (Matt. 15:18) Yes, our speech reveals a lot about who we are on the inside. So ask yourself these questions: ‘Do I refuse to lie, even if telling the truth will cause me trouble? As a married person, am I careful not to flirt with those of the opposite sex? Do I avoid immoral speech like the plague? Do I reply in a calm manner when someone upsets me?’ You will find

13. Why must we safeguard our thinking?

14. What does our speech reveal, and what questions should we answer?

12. What does it mean to “abhor what is wicked”?

The Bible Changes Lives

In 2008, *The Watchtower* began publishing a series entitled “The Bible Changes Lives.” These articles relate real-life accounts of people who made major changes to qualify for baptism. Many similar articles and video interviews can now be found on jw.org. If you are struggling to overcome a bad habit or to change an aspect of your personality, these experiences can encourage you. In this series, you will likely find a story about someone who overcame challenges similar to the ones that you face. You can locate these articles by looking in the *Research Guide for Jehovah’s Witnesses* under the subject “The Bible,” then “Practical Value,” and then “‘The Bible Changes Lives’ (*Watchtower* series).” Or you can type “The Bible Changes Lives” in the search box on jw.org.

it helpful to reflect on those questions. Your speech might be likened to seams in a garment. If you try your best to remove abusive, lying, and immoral speech from your conversation, you will find it easier to strip off the old personality.

15 *Be willing to take decisive action.* The apostle Paul used a powerful word picture to teach us just how serious we must be about changing our lifestyle. He wrote that we must nail our old personality “to

15. What does it mean to nail our old personality “to the stake”?

the stake.” (Rom. 6:6) In other words, we want to follow Christ’s example. We need to kill off attitudes and practices that Jehovah hates. Only if we take these steps will we gain a clean conscience and have the prospect of enjoying everlasting life. (John 17:3; 1 Pet. 3:21) Remember that Jehovah will not change his standards to suit us. Instead, we need to change who we are and conform to his standards. —Isa. 1:16-18; 55:9.

16 *Continue to fight fleshly weaknesses.* Even after you get baptized, you will need to continue to fight fleshly desires. Note the experience of a man named Maurício. While young, he started living a homosexual lifestyle. Eventually, he met Jehovah’s people and began studying the Bible. After making changes in his life, he got baptized in 2002. Even though he has now served Jehovah for many years, Maurício says: “I must admit that I have had to fight improper desires at times.” He does not let this discourage him. Instead, he says: “I take courage in knowing that by choosing not to act on those desires, I can be pleasing to Jehovah.”*

17 *Pray for Jehovah’s help, and rely on his spirit, not on your own strength.* (Gal. 5:22; Phil. 4:6) We must be determined if we are to strip off the old personality and keep it off. Consider the experience of a woman named Nabiha.

* For more details, see the article “The Bible Changes Lives—‘They Were Very Kind to Me,’” published in the May 1, 2012, issue of *The Watchtower*.

16. Why must you be determined to continue fighting fleshly weaknesses?

17. What did you find encouraging about Nabiha’s experience?

Her father abandoned her when she was just six years old. “It caused me tremendous emotional pain,” she says. As she grew up, Nabiha became increasingly angry and aggressive. She got involved in drug trafficking, was arrested, and spent some years in prison. Witnesses who visited the prison began studying the Bible with her. Nabiha started to make serious changes. “Some of my vices were easy for me to give up,” she says. “But quitting smoking was another story.” Nabiha struggled for more than a year and was eventually able to break the addiction. How did she do it? “Above all,” she says, “it was incessant prayer to Jehovah that enabled me to quit.” She now tells others: “I’m confident that if I could make changes in order to please Jehovah, *anyone* can!”*

YOU CAN QUALIFY FOR BAPTISM!

18 In the first century, some of the men

* For more details, see the article “The Bible Changes Lives—‘I Became an Angry, Aggressive Young Woman,’” published in the October 1, 2012, issue of *The Watchtower*.

18. According to 1 Corinthians 6:9-11, what have many of God’s servants been able to do?

and women whom Jehovah chose to be corulers with Christ had once been dominated by bad practices. For example, they had been adulterers, homosexuals, and thieves. With the help of God’s holy spirit, however, they were able to change their personalities. **(Read 1 Corinthians 6:9-11.)** Similarly today, the Bible has helped millions of people to make changes in their lives.* They have overcome deeply entrenched bad habits. Their example proves that you too can make changes in your personality and overcome bad habits so that you can qualify for baptism.

¹⁹ In addition to working to strip off the old personality, those who want to get baptized must make an effort to put on the new personality. The next article will discuss how we can do that and how others can help us.

* See the box “The Bible Changes Lives.”

19. What will the next article discuss?

PICTURE DESCRIPTION Page 3: Removing undesirable attitudes and practices is like stripping off an old garment.

DO YOU REMEMBER?

- What is “the old personality”?
- Why should we “strip off the old personality”?
- How can we “strip off” the old personality and keep it off?

SONG 49

Making Jehovah's
Heart Glad

PREVIEW

No matter what our background is, we can put on “the new personality.” To do so, we must continue to adjust our way of thinking and strive to be like Jesus. This article will consider examples of Jesus’ thinking and actions. It will also show how we can continue to imitate him after we get baptized.

Continue Putting On “the New Personality” After Baptism

“Clothe yourselves with the new personality.”—COL. 3:10.

WHETHER we have been baptized for just a few days or for many decades, all of us want to have the kind of personality that Jehovah loves. To be that type of person, we need to control our thinking. Why? Because our personality is largely shaped by our thoughts. If we regularly think about what appeals to our fleshly desires, we will say and do bad things. (Eph. 4:17-19) On the other hand, if we fill our mind with good thoughts, we will more likely speak and act in a way that pleases our Father, Jehovah.—Gal. 5:16.

² As mentioned in the preceding article, we cannot stop all bad thoughts from entering our mind. But we can choose not to act on such thoughts. Before we get baptized, we need to stop speaking and acting in a way that Jehovah hates. That is the first and most important step in stripping off the old personality. To please Jehovah fully, however, we must also obey the command: “Clothe yourselves with the new personality.” (Col. 3:10) In this article, we will answer the following questions: What is “the new personality”? How can we put on the new personality and keep it on?

WHAT IS “THE NEW PERSONALITY”?

³ “The new personality” is a way of thinking and acting that reflects Jehovah’s personality. A person clothes

1. What primarily shapes our personality?
2. What questions will we consider in this article?
3. Based on Galatians 5:22, 23, what is “the new personality,” and how does a person clothe himself with it?



The more we learn to think like Jesus, the more successful we will be in reflecting his personality (See paragraphs 5, 8, 10, 12, 14)

himself with the new personality by manifesting the fruitage of God's spirit, allowing holy spirit to influence his thoughts, feelings, and actions. (**Read Galatians 5:22, 23.**) For example, he loves Jehovah and His people. (Matt. 22:36-39) Such a person maintains his joy even when coping with trials. (Jas. 1:2-4) He is a peacemaker. (Matt. 5:9) He is patient and kind when dealing with others. (Col. 3:13) He loves what is good and does it. (Luke 6:35) He proves by his actions that he has strong faith in his heavenly Father. (Jas. 2:18) He remains mild when provoked and exercises self-control when tempted.—1 Cor. 9:25, 27; Titus 3:2.

⁴ To put on the new personality, we need to develop all the qualities mentioned at Galatians 5:22, 23 and in other Bible passages.* These qualities are not like individual pieces of clothing that we

* Galatians 5:22, 23 does not provide a complete list of the fine qualities that God's spirit can help us develop. For a discussion of this, see "Questions From Readers" in the June 2020 issue of *The Watchtower*.

4. To put on the new personality, can we develop the qualities mentioned at Galatians 5:22, 23 just one at a time? Explain.

put on one at a time. In fact, aspects of these qualities can be found in other qualities. For instance, if you truly love your neighbor, you will be patient with him and kind to him. And to be genuinely good, you must be mild and use self-control.

HOW CAN WE PUT ON THE NEW PERSONALITY?

⁵ **Read 1 Corinthians 2:16.** To put on the new personality, we need to "have the mind of Christ." In other words, we must learn how Jesus thinks and then imitate him. Jesus displays the fruitage of God's spirit perfectly. Like a flawless mirror, he reflects Jehovah's qualities just as they are. (Heb. 1:3) The more we think like Jesus, the more we will act like him and the more successful we will be in reflecting his personality.—Phil. 2:5.

⁶ Is it really possible for us to follow Jesus' example? We may think: 'Jesus is perfect. I will never be completely like

5. What does it mean to "have the mind of Christ," and why should we study Jesus' life? (1 Corinthians 2:16)

6. What facts should we keep in mind when trying to put on the new personality?

him!’ If you feel that way, remember these facts. First, you were designed to be like Jehovah and Jesus. So you can choose to imitate them, and you can succeed at least to some degree. (Gen. 1: 26) Second, God’s holy spirit is the most powerful force in the universe. With its help, you can accomplish things that you could never do on your own. Third, Jehovah does not expect you to display the fruitage of the spirit perfectly now. In fact, our loving Father has set aside 1,000 years for those with an earthly hope to become perfect. (Rev. 20: 1-3) What Jehovah requires of us now is to try our best and to rely on him for help.

⁷ How, specifically, can we imitate Jesus? We will briefly examine four aspects of the fruitage of God’s spirit. In each case, we will see what we can learn from the way Jesus displayed those qualities. As we do, we will consider some questions that can help us analyze how well we have done with putting on the new personality.

⁸ Jesus’ deep love for Jehovah moved him to make sacrifices for his Father and for us. (John 14:31; 15:13) Jesus proved the depth of his love for people by the way he lived his earthly life. Each day, he was loving and compassionate, even when some opposed him. A key way he showed his love for people was by teaching them about God’s Kingdom. (Luke 4:43, 44) Jesus also proved his self-sacrificing love for God and for men by willingly suffering an agonizing death

at the hands of sinners. He thus opened the way for all of us to gain everlasting life.

⁹ We dedicated ourselves to Jehovah and got baptized because we love our heavenly Father. So, like Jesus, we should show love for Jehovah by how we treat people. The apostle John wrote: “The one who does not love his brother, whom he has seen, cannot love God, whom he has not seen.” (1 John 4:20) We can ask ourselves: ‘Have I developed a deep love for people? Am I compassionate when dealing with others, even if they are rude to me? Does love move me to use my time and resources to help others learn about Jehovah? Am I willing to do this even when most people do not appreciate my efforts or when they oppose me? Can I find ways to spend more time in the disciple-making work?’ —Eph. 5:15, 16.

¹⁰ Jesus was a peaceable man. When people treated him badly, he did not return evil for evil. But he did more than that. He took the initiative to make peace and encouraged others to settle their disputes. For example, he taught them that they must make peace with their brother if they wanted Jehovah to accept their worship. (Matt. 5:9, 23, 24) And he repeatedly helped the apostles to settle their dispute over which one among them was the greatest.—Luke 9: 46-48; 22:24-27.

¹¹ To be a peacemaker, we need to do more than just avoid causing conflicts.

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7. What will we now consider?
8. How did Jesus show love?

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9. How can we imitate Jesus in showing love?
10. How was Jesus a peacemaker?
11. How can we be a peacemaker?

We need to take the initiative to make peace with others and to encourage our brothers and sisters to settle their differences. (Phil. 4:2, 3; Jas. 3:17, 18) We can ask ourselves these questions: ‘What am I willing to sacrifice in order to make peace with others? When a brother or a sister hurts my feelings, do I hold a grudge? Do I wait for the other person to take the initiative to restore peace, or do I take the first step, even if the other person seems to have caused the problem? When appropriate, do I encourage those who have a dispute to make peace with each other?’

¹² Jesus was kind. (Matt. 11:28-30) He showed kindness by being gentle and yielding, even under difficult circumstances. For instance, when a Phoenician woman begged him to heal her child, he declined her request at first, but when she showed great faith, he kindly healed her child. (Matt. 15:22-28) Although he was kind, Jesus was not overly sentimental. Sometimes he showed kindness by being firm with those he loved. For instance, when Peter tried to discourage Jesus from doing Jehovah’s will, Jesus rebuked him in front of the other disciples. (Mark 8:32, 33) He did this, not to humiliate Peter, but to train him and to warn the other disciples not to be presumptuous. No doubt Peter felt some embarrassment, but he benefited from the discipline.

¹³ To be genuinely kind to those you love, at times you may have to speak frankly to them. When you do so, imi-

tate Jesus by basing your counsel on principles found in God’s Word. Be gentle. Assume the best about them, trusting that those who love Jehovah and love you will respond well to your caring counsel. Ask yourself these questions: ‘Do I have the courage to speak up when I see someone I love doing something wrong? If I do need to give counsel, do I speak kindly, or do I speak harshly? What is my motive for giving counsel? Do I offer it because I am irritated by the person, or am I acting in his best interests?’

¹⁴ Jesus not only knows what is good but also does it. Jesus loves his Father, so he always does the right thing with the right motive. The quality of goodness becomes evident by the effect it has on others. It is an active quality that we can manifest by doing helpful deeds. It is not enough to know what is the right thing to do; we must do the right thing and with the right motive. Someone might ask, ‘Is it possible to do the right thing with the wrong motive?’ Yes, it is. For instance, Jesus spoke about those who gave alms to the poor but made sure that others knew about their gifts. Those seemingly good works were of little value to Jehovah.—Matt. 6:1-4.

¹⁵ We can be genuinely good only if we do the right thing for unselfish reasons. So you might ask yourself: ‘Do I not only know what is the right thing to do but also follow through and actually do it? What is my motive for doing good things?’

12. How did Jesus show kindness?

13. How can we be genuinely kind?

14. How did Jesus display goodness?

15. How can we be genuinely good?

HOW CAN WE KEEP OUR NEW PERSONALITY IN GOOD CONDITION?

¹⁶ Let us not conclude that the work involved in putting on the new personality ends at baptism. We need to keep our beautiful “new garment” in good condition. In part, we can do that by looking for ways each day to display the fruitage of God’s spirit. Why? Because Jehovah is a God of action, and his spirit is an active force. (Gen. 1:2) So every aspect of the fruitage of the spirit can and must move us to action. For example, the disciple James wrote: “Faith without works is dead.” (Jas. 2:26) The same could be said of all the other aspects of the fruitage of God’s spirit. Each time we display them, we give evidence that God’s spirit is active in us.

¹⁷ Even Christians who have been baptized for many years at times fail to display the fruitage of the spirit. The important thing, though, is not to give up. Consider this illustration. If you tore your favorite garment, would you immediately throw it out? No. Most likely

16. What should we do each day, and why?

17. How should we react when we fail to display the fruitage of the spirit?

you would carefully repair the damage if that is possible. And you would be more careful thereafter. Likewise, if on occasion you fail to act in a kind, patient, or loving way toward someone, do not become discouraged. A heartfelt apology can repair the damage, so to speak, and put you on the path to restoring your good relationship with the person. Be determined to do better in the future.

¹⁸ How thankful we are to have the example set by Jesus! The more we imitate his thinking and attitude, the easier it will be for us to act like him. The more we act like Jesus, the better we will be at clothing ourselves with the new personality. In this study, we have looked at only four aspects of the fruitage of God’s spirit. Why not spend some time reviewing other aspects of the fruitage of the spirit and reflecting on how well you are displaying those qualities? You will find a list of articles on this topic in the *Research Guide for Jehovah’s Witnesses* under the subject “Christian Life” and then “Fruitage of the Spirit.” You can be certain that if you do your part, Jehovah will help you to put on the new personality and keep it on.

18. Of what can we be certain?

DO YOU REMEMBER?

- | | | |
|----------------------------------|--|--|
| ■ What is “the new personality”? | ■ How can we put on the new personality? | ■ How can we keep the new personality in good condition? |
|----------------------------------|--|--|

Why does 2 Samuel 21:7-9 say that David “showed compassion for Mephibosheth” but then handed Mephibosheth over for execution?

■ Some who quickly read this account have wondered about that. But two different men named Mephibosheth were involved, and we can learn something by reviewing what happened.

King Saul of Israel had seven sons and two daughters. Saul’s firstborn son was Jonathan. The king later had a son named Mephibosheth, born to Saul’s concubine Rizpah. Interestingly, Jonathan also had a son named Mephibosheth. Thus, King Saul had both a son named Mephibosheth and a grandson with that same name.

At some point, King Saul turned against the Gibeonites living among the Israelites and attempted to wipe them out. Apparently, a number of them were murdered. That clearly was wrong. Why? Because back in Joshua’s day, the Israelite chieftains made a covenant of peace with the Gibeonites.—Josh. 9:3-27.

That covenant was still in force in King Saul’s time. Contrary to the covenant, the king tried to wipe out the Gibeonites. That attempt resulted in “bloodguilt on Saul and on his house.” (2 Sam. 21:1) Finally, David became king. Surviving Gibeonites spoke to him about the grave wrong. David asked them how atonement should be made for Saul’s horrible course and thus open the way for Jehovah to bless the land. Rather than ask for money, the Gibeonites asked that seven sons of the man who “schemed to annihilate” them be handed over and put to death. (Num. 35:30, 31) David granted their request.—2 Sam. 21:2-6.

By then, Saul and Jonathan had died in battle, but Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth was alive. He was crippled as a child by an

accident and was not party to his grandfather’s attack on the Gibeonites. David had made a covenant of friendship with Jonathan, which would benefit his offspring, including Jonathan’s son Mephibosheth.

(1 Sam. 18:1; 20:42) The account says: “The king [David] showed compassion for Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the oath made before Jehovah.”—2 Sam. 21:7.

Still, David honored the Gibeonites’ request. He handed over two of Saul’s sons, one of whom was named Mephibosheth, and five of Saul’s grandsons. (2 Sam. 21:8, 9) David’s course of action ended the bloodguilt on the land.

This episode is more than history. God’s law was clear. It stated: “Children should not be put to death for what their fathers do.” (Deut. 24:16) Jehovah would not have approved of what was done to Saul’s two sons and five grandsons if they had been innocent. That law added: “A person should be put to death only for his own sin.” It seems that Saul’s seven descendants who died had some share in Saul’s attempted genocide of the Gibeonites. As a result, the seven paid for their wrongdoing.

This account illustrates that a person cannot excuse himself for doing wrong by thinking or saying that he was merely following directions. A wise proverb states: “Smooth out the course of your feet, and all your ways will be sure.”—Prov. 4:24-27; Eph. 5:15.

SONG 73

Grant Us Boldness

PREVIEW

Jehovah gave the prophet Zechariah a series of thrilling visions. What Zechariah saw gave him and Jehovah's people the strength to overcome the challenges they faced as they struggled to reestablish pure worship. Those visions can also help us to serve Jehovah faithfully despite our challenges. In this article, we will discuss valuable lessons that we can learn from one of Zechariah's visions, which involved a lampstand and olive trees.

Do You See What Zechariah Saw?

“By my spirit,’ says Jehovah of armies.”—ZECH. 4:6.

THERE was excitement in the air. Jehovah God had “stirred the spirit of King Cyrus of Persia” to release the Israelites, who had spent decades in Babylonian captivity. The king made a proclamation for the Jews to return to their homeland “and rebuild the house of Jehovah the God of Israel.” (Ezra 1:1, 3) What a thrilling decree that was! It meant that the worship of the true God was going to be restored in the land he had given to his people.

² In 537 B.C.E., the first of the exiles arrived in Jerusalem, which had been the capital of the southern kingdom of Judah. Those returning Jews soon got to work on the temple, and by 536 B.C.E., they had already laid its foundation!

³ Once they started to rebuild the temple, though, those former exiles began to face strong opposition. The surrounding peoples “were continually discouraging the people of Judah and disheartening them from building.” (Ezra 4:4) As bad as that was, the situation got worse. In 522 B.C.E., a new Persian king, Artaxerxes, came to power.* Opposers viewed this change in rulership as their chance to put a permanent stop to the building work by “framing trouble in the name of the law.” (Ps. 94:20) They told King Artaxerxes that, among other things, the Jews were planning to rebel against him. (Ezra 4:11-16)

* Years later, in the days of Governor Nehemiah, a different ruler named Artaxerxes was very favorable to the Jews.

1. What exciting prospect lay ahead for Jewish exiles?
2. What initial success did the returning exiles enjoy?
3. What opposition did the Jews face?

The king believed their lies and ordered a ban on the temple construction. (Ezra 4:17-23) With that, the work of the once joyful temple builders ground to a halt. —Ezra 4:24.

⁴ The pagan inhabitants of the land and some in the Persian government were determined to stop the rebuilding of the temple. But Jehovah was determined to keep the building program moving forward, and he always accomplishes his purpose. **(Read Isaiah 55:11.)** He raised up a fearless prophet named Zechariah and gave him a series of eight thrilling visions, which he was to share with the Jews for their encouragement. Those reassuring visions helped them to see that they had nothing to fear from their opposers and urged them to press ahead with Jehovah's work. In the fifth of those visions, Zechariah saw a lampstand and two olive trees.

⁵ We all get discouraged at times. So we can benefit from considering the encouragement Jehovah gave the Israelites through Zechariah's fifth vision. Understanding this vision can help us to serve Jehovah faithfully when we are dealing with opposition, when we are coping with change, and when we receive direction that we do not understand.

DEALING WITH OPPOSITION

⁶ **Read Zechariah 4:1-3.** The vision of the lampstand and the two olive trees

4. How did Jehovah deal with the opposition to the temple building? (Isaiah 55:11)

5. What will we consider in this article?

6. How did the vision of the lampstand and the two olive trees, described at Zechariah 4:1-3, give the Jews courage? (See cover picture.)

gave the Jews the courage to overcome opposition. How? Did you notice that the lampstand had a continuous source of fuel? Two olive trees supplied oil to a bowl-like reservoir that, in turn, furnished oil to each of the seven lamps on the lampstand. This oil kept the lamps burning without letup. Zechariah asked: "What do these things mean?" The angel answered with this message from Jehovah: "'Not by a military force, nor by power, but by my spirit,' says Jehovah of armies." (Zech. 4:4, 6) The oil from the trees represented Jehovah's powerful holy spirit, an inexhaustible supply of it. All the military might of the Persian Empire was as nothing in comparison with the power behind God's spirit. With Jehovah on their side, the temple builders would be able to resist any opposition and complete their work. What an encouraging message! All that the Jews needed to do was to trust in Jehovah and get back to work. That is exactly what they did even though the ban was still in place.

⁷ A change brought a measure of relief to the temple builders. What change? In 520 B.C.E., a new king, Darius I, was ruling Persia. In the second year of his reign, he discovered that the ban on the temple construction was illegal. Darius then gave royal approval to complete the work. (Ezra 6:1-3) That news alone was enough to surprise everyone—but there was more. The king ordered the surrounding peoples to stop interfering in the rebuilding work and to provide

7. What change brought a measure of relief to the temple builders?

Rely on Jehovah's power
when you face opposition
(See paragraph 8)



funds and supplies to support it! (Ezra 6: 7-12) As a result, the Jews finished building the temple a little over four years later, in 515 B.C.E.—Ezra 6:15.

⁸ Today, too, many of Jehovah's worshippers face opposition. For example, some live in lands where our work is restricted. In such lands, brothers may be arrested and "brought before governors and kings" for a witness to them. (Matt. 10:17, 18) At times, a change in rulership may bring relief. Or a fair-minded judge may render a decision that is favorable to the work. Other Witnesses face opposition of a different sort. They live in a country where there is considerable freedom to worship Jehovah, but they still face opposition from family members who are determined to stop them from serving their God. (Matt. 10:32-36) In many cases, when opposers realize that their efforts to discourage their Witness relatives are in vain, they stop opposing them. And in some cases, those who were once violently op-

posed have later become zealous Witnesses. When you face opposition, do not give up! Be courageous. You have Jehovah and his powerful holy spirit on your side, so you have nothing to fear!

COPING WITH CHANGE

⁹ When the foundation of the new temple was laid, some of the older Jews wept. (Ezra 3:12) They had seen the glorious temple built by Solomon, and they felt that the newly built temple would be "nothing in comparison" with the previous one. (Hag. 2:2, 3) The contrast between the old and the new was more than they could bear. Zechariah's vision would help them to overcome their disappointment. How?

¹⁰ **Read Zechariah 4:8-10.** What did the angel mean when he said that the Jews would "rejoice and see the plumb line in the hand of [the Jewish governor] Zerubbabel"? A plumb line is a tool for

8. Why can you be courageous when you face opposition?

9. Why were some Jews disappointed when the foundation of the new temple was laid?

10. How did the angel's words recorded at Zechariah 4:8-10 help the Jews to overcome their disappointment?

determining whether something is perfectly vertical, or upright. The angel was thus assuring God's people that, as modest as the temple may have appeared to some, it would be completed and would meet Jehovah's standards. He would be pleased with it, so why should they not be pleased? What was important to Jehovah was that the worship carried out in the new temple be in harmony with his requirements. If the Jews focused on worshipping Jehovah acceptably and on gaining his approval, their joy would return.

¹¹ Change is challenging for many of us. Some who served in a form of special full-time service for a long time have received a change of assignment. Others have had to relinquish a cherished privilege because of their age. It is normal to feel disappointed when such a change affects us. Initially, we may not fully understand the decision or agree with it. We may miss the way things used to be. And we may become discouraged, feel-

11. What challenges do some of Jehovah's worshippers face today?

ing that in our new circumstances, we are of little use to Jehovah. (Prov. 24:10) How can Zechariah's vision help us to keep giving our best to our God?

¹² We cope better with change when we look at things from Jehovah's perspective. He is accomplishing great things today, and we have the unique privilege of being his fellow workers. (1 Cor. 3:9) Our responsibilities may change, but Jehovah's love for us will not. Consequently, if a change in the organization affects you personally, avoid getting caught up in the whys and wherefores behind the change. Rather than long for "the former days," prayerfully look for the good in the change. (Eccl. 7:10) Rather than think about the things you can no longer do, think about all the things you can do. From Zechariah's vision, we learn the importance of keeping a positive attitude. Thus we will remain joyful and faithful even when our circumstances change.

12. How can Zechariah's vision help us to cope with disappointment resulting from a change in our circumstances?



**Cultivate a positive view
of new circumstances**
(See paragraphs 11-12)

Trust the direction you receive from “the faithful and discreet slave”
(See paragraph 16)



WHEN IT IS CHALLENGING TO FOLLOW DIRECTION

¹³ The work to rebuild the temple was banned. Still, the men appointed to take the lead—High Priest Jeshua (Joshua) and Governor Zerubbabel—“started to rebuild the house of God.” (Ezra 5: 1, 2) That decision may have seemed ill-advised to some Jews. The work of temple building could not be hidden from the enemy, who would use every means available to make trouble. The two responsible men, Joshua and Zerubbabel, needed reassurance that they had Jehovah’s backing. They received it. How?

¹⁴ **Read Zechariah 4:12, 14.** In this part of Zechariah’s vision, the angel reveals to God’s faithful prophet that the two olive trees represent “the two anointed ones”—Joshua and Zerubbabel. Those two men were represented as figuratively “standing alongside the

13. Why might some Israelites have felt that the instruction to resume building the temple was ill-advised?

14. According to Zechariah 4:12, 14, High Priest Joshua and Governor Zerubbabel received what reassurance?

Lord of the whole earth,” Jehovah. What a privileged position to be in! Jehovah had confidence in them. Accordingly, their fellow Israelites had every reason to have confidence in their decisions and in God’s direction, no matter what form that direction might take.

¹⁵ One way that Jehovah continues to provide direction to his people today is by means of his Word, the Bible. In that sacred volume, he tells us how to worship him acceptably. How can we show that we respect the direction we receive from God’s Word? By paying close attention to it and by taking the time to understand it. Ask yourself: ‘When I read the Bible or one of our publications, do I stop and meditate? Do I search for the meaning of Bible truths that “are hard to understand”? Or do I simply skim over the material quickly?’ (2 Pet. 3:16) If we take the time to ponder over what Jehovah is teaching us, we will be able to follow his direction and accomplish our preaching work.—1 Tim. 4:15, 16.

15. How can we show that we respect Jehovah’s direction as found in his Word?

¹⁶ Another way that Jehovah provides direction is by means of “the faithful and discreet slave.” (Matt. 24:45) At times, this slave may give direction that we do not fully understand. For example, we may receive specific instructions designed to prepare us to survive a natural disaster that we think is unlikely to occur in our area. Or we may feel that the slave is being overly cautious during a pandemic. What should we do if we feel that the instructions given are not practical? We can think about how the Israelites benefited by heeding the counsel given through Joshua and Zerubbabel. We can also think about other Bible accounts that we have read. Sometimes God’s people received direction that did not appear to be practical from a human standpoint but turned out to be lifesaving.—Judg. 7:7; 8:10.

SEE WHAT ZECHARIAH SAW

¹⁷ The fifth vision Zechariah saw may have been brief, but it gave the Jews a fresh perspective on their work and their worship. And when they acted in accord

16. When we do not fully understand the direction we receive from “the faithful and discreet slave,” what will help us to comply with it?

17. What effect did the vision of the lampstand and the two olive trees have on the Jews?

with what Zechariah saw, they felt Jehovah’s loving support and direction. By means of his powerful holy spirit, Jehovah helped them to continue their work and to regain their joy.—Ezra 6:16.

¹⁸ Zechariah’s vision of the lampstand and the two olive trees can have a powerful effect on your life. As we have discussed, it can help you to find the **strength** you need to face opposers, the **joy** you need to cope with changes in your circumstances, and the **trust** you need to be obedient when you receive direction that you do not understand. What should you do when you experience challenges in your life? First, see what Zechariah saw—evidence that Jehovah is caring for His people. Then, act on what you see by trusting in Jehovah and continuing to worship him with your whole heart. (Matt. 22:37) If you do, Jehovah will help you to serve him with joy forever.—Col. 1:10, 11.

18. How can Zechariah’s vision affect you?

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS **Page 17:** A brother sees the need to adapt to changing circumstances brought on by age and poor health. **Page 18:** A sister reflects on the fact that Jehovah is backing “the faithful and discreet slave,” just as he did Joshua and Zerubbabel.

HOW DOES ZECHARIAH’S VISION HELP US . . .

- when dealing with opposition?
- when coping with change?
- when given direction?

SONG 7

Jehovah, Our Strength

SONG 31

Oh, Walk With God!

PREVIEW

As the Creator of all things, Jehovah deserves to be worshipped. Our formal acts of worship are acceptable to him when we are obeying his commands and living in harmony with his principles. In this article, we will discuss eight different aspects of our worship. As you consider your share in these aspects, see how they will add to your happiness.

True Worship Will Add to Your Happiness

“You are worthy, Jehovah our God, to receive the glory and the honor and the power.”—REV. 4:11.

WHAT do you think of when you hear the word “worship”? Perhaps you picture a humble brother kneeling at his bedside as he pours his heart out in earnest prayer. Or maybe you think of a happy family thoroughly absorbed in Bible study.

² In both cases, those involved are engaged in acts of worship. Will Jehovah accept their worship? He will if it is in harmony with his purpose and is being offered with love and respect. We love Jehovah very much. We know that he deserves to be worshipped, and we want our gift of worship to be of the best possible quality.

³ In this article, we will review the kind of worship that Jehovah accepted in ancient times and we will consider eight aspects of acceptable worship today. As we do so, we can think about how we personally can improve the quality of our worship. We will also review reasons why true worship makes us happy.

WORSHIP THAT JEHOVAH ACCEPTED IN ANCIENT TIMES

⁴ In pre-Christian times, such faithful men as Abel, Noah, Abraham, and Job demonstrated their respect

1-2. What will make our worship acceptable to God?

3. What will we consider in this article?

4. How did worshippers of Jehovah in pre-Christian times demonstrate their respect and love for Jehovah?

and love for Jehovah. How? By means of their obedience, faith, and sacrifices. The Bible does not provide specifics about what form their worship should have taken. But they clearly did their best to honor Jehovah, and their worship was acceptable to him. Jehovah then gave the Mosaic Law to Abraham's descendants. This series of laws included specific instructions about how to worship Jehovah in a way that he approved.

⁵ After Jesus' death and resurrection, Jehovah no longer required obedience to the Mosaic Law. (Rom. 10:4) Christians were to follow a new law, "the law of the Christ." (Gal. 6:2) They could obey this "law," not by memorizing it and adhering to a long list of dos and don'ts, but by imitating Jesus' example and following his teachings. Today, too, Christians do their best to follow the Christ in order to please Jehovah and "find refreshment" for themselves.—Matt. 11:29.

⁶ As we consider each aspect of our worship, ask yourself, 'What progress have I made in this regard?' You might also ask, 'Can I improve the quality of my worship?' You should feel good about the progress you have made, but you will want to give prayerful thought to any improvements you need to make.

WHAT DOES OUR WORSHIP INCLUDE?

⁷ ***We worship Jehovah when we pray to him.*** The Scriptures compare our

prayers to the carefully prepared incense that was offered at the tabernacle and later at the temple. (Ps. 141:2) That incense produced an aroma that was pleasing to God. Similarly, our heartfelt prayers are "a pleasure" to him, even if we use very simple words. (Prov. 15:8; Deut. 33:10) We have good reason to believe that it warms Jehovah's heart to hear us express our love and gratitude to him. He wants us to share with him our concerns, our hopes, and our desires. Before approaching Jehovah in prayer, why not give careful thought to what you are going to say? In doing so, you will offer the best possible "incense" to your heavenly Father.

⁸ ***We worship Jehovah when we praise him.*** (Ps. 34:1) We praise Jehovah by speaking appreciatively of his marvelous qualities and his works. Praise springs from a grateful heart. By taking the time to meditate on Jehovah's goodness—on all the things he has done for us—we will never run out of reasons to praise him. The preaching work gives us an especially fine opportunity to "offer to God a sacrifice of praise, that is, the fruit of our lips." (Heb. 13:15) Just as we should give careful thought to what we are going to say before approaching Jehovah in prayer, we do well to think carefully about what we will say to those we come in contact with in our ministry. We want our "sacrifice of praise" to be our very best. We speak from our heart when we share the truth with others.

5. What change was made as to true worship after Jesus' death and resurrection?

6. How can we benefit from this article?

7. How does Jehovah view our heartfelt prayers?

8. What fine opportunity do we have to praise God?

⁹ ***We worship Jehovah when we attend meetings.*** The ancient Israelites were told: “Three times a year, all your males should appear before Jehovah your God in the place that he chooses.” (Deut. 16:16) They had to leave their home and their crops unguarded. But Jehovah promised them: “Nobody will desire your land while you are going up to see the face of Jehovah your God.” (Ex. 34:24) With full faith in Jehovah, those God-fearing Israelites attended the yearly festivals. They could thus reap rich rewards; they broadened their understanding of God’s Law, meditated on his goodness, and enjoyed encouraging association with fellow believers. (Deut. 16:15) We receive similar benefits when we make sacrifices to attend Christian meetings. And think of how pleased Jehovah is when we come prepared to offer brief, meaningful comments.

¹⁰ ***We worship Jehovah when we join in song.*** (Ps. 28:7) The Israelites considered singing to be an important part of their worship. King David assigned 288 Levites to be singers at the temple. (1 Chron. 25:1, 6-8) Today, we can express our love for God when we sing songs of praise. The quality of our voice is not the most important thing. Consider this comparison: When we speak, “we all stumble many times,” but that does not prevent us from speaking in the congregation and in the ministry. (Jas. 3:2) Similarly, we should not allow concerns

about the imperfections of our singing voice to prevent us from singing praises to Jehovah.

¹¹ ***We worship Jehovah when we study his Word and teach our children about him.*** The Sabbath gave the Israelites the opportunity to set aside their day-to-day activities and concentrate on their relationship with Jehovah. (Ex. 31:16, 17) Faithful ones among them taught their children about Jehovah and his goodness. We personally ought to schedule time to read and study God’s Word. This is part of our worship to Jehovah, and it helps us draw closer to him. (Ps. 73:28) And when we study together as a family, we can help a new generation—our children—to develop a warm, personal relationship with our loving heavenly Father.—**Read Psalm 48:13.**

¹² ***We worship Jehovah as we build and maintain places of worship.*** The Bible says that the work of making the tabernacle and its furnishings was “holy work.” (Ex. 36:1, 4) Today, too, Jehovah views the work of constructing Kingdom Halls and other theocratic facilities as sacred service. Some brothers and sisters spend much time engaging in these activities. Do we not appreciate this vital contribution to the Kingdom work? Of course, they also engage in the preaching work. Some of them may even want to be pioneers. Congregation elders can show their support for the construction activities by not hesitating

9. Like the ancient Israelites, how do we benefit by meeting together? Give a personal example.

10. How is singing an important part of our worship?

11. As described at Psalm 48:13, why should we schedule time for family Bible study?

12. What do we learn from how Jehovah viewed the work of those who made the furnishings of the tabernacle?



Add to Your Happiness

There are various aspects of true worship in our time. Individually and in combination, they can add to your happiness—now and forever.



to appoint these hardworking men and women as pioneers when they qualify. Whether we are skilled in construction work or not, all of us can share in keeping the buildings clean and in good repair.

¹³ ***We worship Jehovah when we support the Kingdom work with our donations.*** The Israelites were not to appear before Jehovah empty-handed. (Deut. 16:16) They were to bring a material gift according to their circumstances. Thus they expressed their appreciation for all the arrangements that had been made to benefit them spiritually. How can we express our love for Jehovah and our appreciation for the spiritual provisions we receive? One way is by giving financial support to the local congregation and to the worldwide work as our circumstances allow. The apostle Paul put it this way: “If the readiness is there first, it is especially acceptable according to what a person has, not according to what a person does not have.” (2 Cor. 8:4, 12) Jehovah values any heartfelt donation we make, no matter how modest the amount.—Mark 12:42-44; 2 Cor. 9:7.

¹⁴ ***We worship Jehovah when we help fellow Christians who are in need.*** Jehovah promised to repay Israelites who showed favor to the poor. (Deut. 15:7, 10) Yes, each time we help a fellow worshipper who is in need, Jehovah views it as a gift to Him. **(Read Prov-**

erbs 19:17.) For example, when Christians from Philippi sent a gift to the prisoner Paul, he called it “an acceptable sacrifice, well-pleasing to God.” (Phil. 4:18) Look around the congregation and ask yourself, ‘Is there someone I can help?’ Jehovah is pleased when he sees us use our time, energy, skills, and material things to help those in need. He considers that to be part of our worship.—Jas. 1:27.

TRUE WORSHIP MAKES US HAPPY

¹⁵ True worship requires time and effort. But it is not burdensome. (1 John 5:3) Why not? Because we worship Jehovah out of love for him. Imagine a young child who wants to give something to his father. He might spend hours drawing a picture for him. The son does not begrudge the time he spent on it. He loves his father, and he is happy to give him that gift. Similarly, because of our love for Jehovah, we are happy to put forth time and effort in order to share in true worship.

¹⁶ Loving parents do not expect to receive the same gift from each of their children. They realize that each child is different and has different circumstances. Similarly, our heavenly Father understands our individual circumstances. Maybe you can do more than many whom you know and love. Or you may not be able to do as much as others do, perhaps because of your age, health, or

13. How should we view the donations we make to support the Kingdom work?

14. According to Proverbs 19:17, how does Jehovah view the help we give to our brothers in need?

15. True worship requires time and effort, but why is it not burdensome?

16. According to Hebrews 6:10, how does Jehovah view our personal efforts to please him?

family responsibilities. Do not be discouraged. (Gal. 6:4) Jehovah will not forget **your** work. As long as you are giving your best and with the right motive, he will be pleased. **(Read Hebrews 6:10.)** Jehovah sees even the intentions of your heart. He wants you to be happy and satisfied with the worship you are able to give him.

¹⁷ What if we find it hard to engage in some aspect of our worship, such as personal study or the public ministry? We will likely find that the more often we engage in these activities, the more we will enjoy them and benefit from them. We might compare our worship to some activity, such as doing a type of exercise or practicing a musical instrument. If we do so only occasionally, we might not make much progress. But suppose

17. (a) If we find some aspects of our worship to be difficult, what steps can we take? (b) How have you been helped by one aspect shown in the box “Add to Your Happiness”?

we decide to make it part of our daily routine. We might start with brief periods and gradually lengthen them. As we see the good results of our efforts, we will likely look forward to these periods and really enjoy them. Can you see how we can apply this approach to our worship?

¹⁸ We fulfill the very purpose of our existence by worshipping Jehovah wholeheartedly. As a result, we enjoy a happy and meaningful life and we have the hope of worshipping Jehovah forever. (Prov. 10:22) We already have peace of mind because we know that Jehovah helps his worshippers when they experience problems. (Isa. 41:9, 10) We certainly have good reasons to be happy as we worship our loving Father, who is worthy “to receive the glory and the honor” from all his creation!—Rev. 4:11.

18. How do we fulfill the purpose of our existence, and with what results?

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- What kind of worship did Jehovah accept in ancient times?
- What does our worship include today?
- Why does worshipping Jehovah make us happy?

SONG 99

Myriads of Brothers

PREVIEW

How blessed we are to benefit from the hard work of loving, caring elders! In this article, we will discuss four common challenges they face. We will also consider how the apostle Paul's example can help elders today to meet those challenges. This material will help all of us to feel empathy for our elders and to be motivated to show them love and give them support.

Elders—Continue to Imitate the Apostle Paul

“Become imitators of me.”—1 COR. 11:1.

THE apostle Paul loved his brothers. He worked tirelessly in their behalf. (Acts 20:31) In turn, his fellow believers had deep affection for Paul. On one occasion, “quite a bit of weeping broke out” when the elders from Ephesus learned that they would never see him again. (Acts 20:37) Our devoted elders likewise love their brothers and sisters very much and spare no effort when it comes to helping them. (Phil. 2:16, 17) Sometimes, however, elders experience challenges. What can help them to overcome these?

² Our hardworking elders can consider the example of Paul. (1 Cor. 11:1) He was not superhuman. Paul was an imperfect man who at times struggled to do what was right. (Rom. 7:18-20) And he had to contend with various hardships. But Paul did not give up or lose his joy. By imitating Paul, elders can overcome the challenges they face and maintain their joy while serving Jehovah. Let us see how.

³ In this article, we will examine four common challenges that elders face: (1) balancing their preaching work with other responsibilities, (2) being caring shepherds, (3) coping with personal weaknesses, and (4) dealing with the imperfections of others. We will discuss how Paul overcame each challenge and how elders can imitate his example.

1-2. How can the apostle Paul's example help elders today?

3. What will we examine in this article, and what will we be helped to do?

BALANCING THE PREACHING WORK WITH OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES

⁴ **Why it can be a challenge.** Elders have many responsibilities in addition to taking the lead in the preaching work. For example, many take turns presiding over the midweek meeting and conducting the Congregation Bible Study. They may also care for other speaking assignments. They are active in training ministerial servants and are happy to provide ongoing encouragement to the brothers and sisters. (1 Pet. 5:2) Some elders work on the building and maintenance of Kingdom Halls and other theocratic facilities. Still, like all in the congregation, an elder is first and foremost a minister of the good news.—Matt. 28:19, 20.

⁵ **Paul's example.** The key to Paul's success is found at Philippians 1:10, where he urges us: "Make sure of the more important things." Paul followed his own advice. He had been assigned a ministry, and for decades he viewed that ministry as one of the more important

things. He preached "publicly and from house to house." (Acts 20:20) He did not limit his preaching activity to a certain time of day or to one day of the week. He took advantage of every opportunity to preach! For example, while waiting for his companions in Athens, he introduced the good news to a distinguished group of people, with some positive results. (Acts 17:16, 17, 34) Even while in "prison bonds," Paul preached to those who were around him.—Phil. 1:13, 14; Acts 28:16-24.

⁶ Paul made the best use of his time. He often invited others to join him in the ministry. For example, on his first missionary tour, he took John Mark, and on his second, Timothy. (Acts 12:25; 16:1-4) No doubt Paul endeavored to teach these men how to organize a congregation, how to carry out the shepherd-ing work, and how to become effective teachers.—1 Cor. 4:17.

⁷ **Lesson.** Elders can imitate Paul not only by preaching from door to door but also by being ready and willing to give a witness on every occasion. **(Read**

4. Why might elders find it challenging to take the lead in the preaching work?

5. What example did Paul set as a preacher?

6. What training did Paul provide?

7. How can elders follow Paul's admonition recorded at Ephesians 6:14, 15?



Imitate Paul by being
ready to give a witness
(See paragraph 7)



Commend others
and build them up
(See paragraphs 10, 12)

Ephesians 6:14, 15.) For example, they can give a witness when out shopping or at their place of employment. Or when caring for theocratic building projects, they can share the good news with neighbors and vendors. Like Paul, elders can use the time spent in the ministry to train others, including ministerial servants.

⁸ Elders should never be so busy caring for assignments in the congregation or in the circuit that they have no time for the preaching work. To remain balanced, they may on occasion need to say no to some assignments. After prayerful consideration, they may realize that they could not care for an assignment without neglecting the more important things. Such things would include conducting family worship each week, having a full share in the preaching work, or training their children in that activity. Some find it difficult to refuse a privilege of service, but they can be sure that Jehovah understands their desire to be balanced in all things.

BEING A CARING SHEPHERD

⁹ ***Why it can be a challenge.*** Jehovah's people experience many trials. During

8. At times, what may an elder need to do?

9. What challenge do busy elders face?

these last days, all of us need encouragement, support, and comfort. And at times some need help to avoid wrong conduct. (1 Thess. 5:14) Of course, elders cannot remove all the trials that Jehovah's people face. Even so, Jehovah wants elders to do what they can to encourage and protect his sheep. How can busy elders find the time to provide the needed assistance?

¹⁰ ***Paul's example.*** Paul looked for ways to commend his brothers and build them up. Elders do well to follow his loving example by treating Jehovah's people with tender affection. (**Read 1 Thessalonians 2:7.**) Paul assured fellow worshippers that he loved them and that Jehovah loved them. (2 Cor. 2:4; Eph. 2:4, 5) Paul treated those in the congregation as friends, spending time with them. He showed that he trusted them by speaking openly about his own fears and weaknesses. (2 Cor. 7:5; 1 Tim. 1:15) Paul, however, did not focus on his own problems. Rather, he wanted to help his brothers.

¹¹ At times, Paul needed to counsel his brothers and sisters. But he never did so to vent his frustration. He gave counsel

10. In line with 1 Thessalonians 2:7, how did Paul care for Jehovah's people?

11. Why did Paul counsel his brothers and sisters?

because he cared about them and wanted to protect them from various dangers. He tried to make his counsel easy to understand, and he cared about how it was received. For example, in a letter to the Corinthians, Paul gave strong counsel. After writing that letter, he sent Titus to them. Paul was anxious to learn how they responded to his letter. How happy he was to find out that they had taken the counsel well!—2 Cor. 7:6, 7.

¹² **Lesson.** Elders can follow Paul's example by spending time with fellow worshippers. One way to do this is to arrive early at congregation meetings in order to have meaningful conversations with others. It often takes just a few minutes to provide some loving encouragement that a brother or a sister needs. (Rom. 1:12; Eph. 5:16) An elder who follows Paul's example will also strengthen fellow worshippers by using God's Word to build them up and to assure them of God's love for them. Further, he expresses his love for those under his care. He keeps in touch with them and looks for opportunities to commend them. When an elder must offer counsel,

12. How can elders strengthen fellow worshippers?

he bases it on God's Word. He is specific but kind because he cares about how his words are received.—Gal. 6:1.

COPING WITH PERSONAL WEAKNESSES

¹³ **Why it can be a challenge.** Elders are not perfect. Like everyone else, they make mistakes. (Rom. 3:23) They may at times struggle to have a balanced view of their weaknesses. Some might focus on their limitations so much that they become discouraged. Others might be quick to excuse their failings, causing them to become complacent and not make the needed adjustments.

¹⁴ **Paul's example.** Paul humbly recognized that he could not cope with his weaknesses on his own. He needed the strength that God can provide. Earlier, Paul had been a headstrong, harsh persecutor of Christians. But later, he acknowledged his shortcomings and was willing to change his attitude and personality. (1 Tim. 1:12-16) With Jehovah's help, Paul became a loving, compassionate, humble shepherd. He was

13. What effect can personal weaknesses have on an elder?

14. According to Philippians 4:13, how did humility help Paul to cope with his weaknesses?



Work hard to overcome
personal weaknesses
(See paragraphs 14-15)



Try not to be
judgmental
of others
(See paragraph 19)

painfully aware of his imperfections; yet, he chose to trust in Jehovah's forgiveness rather than dwell on his failings. (Rom. 7:21-25) He did not expect to be perfect. Instead, he worked hard to improve his Christian personality and humbly relied on Jehovah's help to accomplish his work.—1 Cor. 9:27; **read Philippians 4:13.**

¹⁵ **Lesson.** Elders are not appointed because they are perfect. Jehovah, though, does expect them to admit their mistakes and to cultivate a Christian personality. (Eph. 4:23, 24) An elder should examine himself in the light of God's Word and make any needed adjustments. Then Jehovah will help him to be happy and successful.—Jas. 1:25.

DEALING WITH THE IMPERFECTIONS OF OTHERS

¹⁶ **Why it can be a challenge.** Elders may become aware of the imperfections of those in the congregation because of working closely with them. If not careful, however, elders could become frustrated, harsh, or judgmental. Paul warned Christians that Satan would like them to do that.—2 Cor. 2:10, 11.

15. What balanced view should elders have of their weaknesses?

16. What could happen if an elder focused on the imperfections of others?

¹⁷ **Paul's example.** He kept a positive view of his brothers and sisters. He was well-aware of their mistakes, for at times their actions even affected him personally. Nevertheless, Paul knew the difference between bad conduct and bad people. He loved his brothers and focused on their good qualities. If his brothers and sisters were struggling to do the right thing, he assumed that their motives were good and that they simply needed help.

¹⁸ Consider, for example, how Paul dealt with two sisters in the congregation in Philippi. (**Read Philippians 4:1-3.**) Euodia and Syntyche seemed to have allowed personal differences to cause a rift between them. Paul was not harsh or judgmental; he focused on their good qualities. They were faithful sisters who had built up a fine record. Paul knew that Jehovah loved them. Paul's positive view of these sisters motivated him to encourage them to resolve their differences. His outlook also allowed him to keep his joy and maintain strong friendships with those in that congregation.

17. How did Paul view his brothers and sisters?

18. What do you learn from how Paul dealt with Euodia and Syntyche's situation? (Philippians 4:1-3)

¹⁹ **Lesson.** Elders, look for the good qualities that your brothers and sisters possess. Each one is imperfect; yet, each one has qualities we can admire. (Phil. 2:3) True, elders may from time to time need to adjust the thinking of a brother or a sister. But like Paul, elders should strive to look beyond a person's irritating words and actions. Instead, they do well to focus on that individual's love for Jehovah, his endurance in serving God, and his potential for doing good. Elders who have a positive view create a warm and nurturing environment in the congregation.

CONTINUE TO IMITATE PAUL

²⁰ You elders will find it helpful to continue studying Paul's example. For instance, in the *Watch Tower Publications Index*, you could look under the main heading "Paul" and then the subheading

19. (a) How can elders keep a positive view of fellow worshippers? (b) What can you learn from the picture of the elder cleaning the Kingdom Hall?

20. How can elders continue to benefit from Paul's example?

"example for elders." As you read some of the material listed there, ask yourself, 'How can Paul's example help me to maintain my joy while accomplishing my work as an elder?'

²¹ Elders, remember that Jehovah is not asking you to be perfect; he is asking you to be faithful. (1 Cor. 4:2) Jehovah appreciated Paul's hard work and faithfulness. You can be sure that God also values what you do in his service. Jehovah will never "forget your work and the love you showed for his name by ministering and continuing to minister to the holy ones."—Heb. 6:10.

21. What can elders be sure of?

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS **Page 27:** As a brother leaves his place of work, he shares the good news with a workmate. **Page 28:** An elder warmly shepherds a brother who tends to isolate himself. **Page 29:** A brother provides helpful advice for someone who has taken offense over a matter. **Page 30:** An elder is not critical of a brother who has become distracted from doing a task he had volunteered for.

WHAT CAN HELP ELDERS . . .

- to balance the preaching work with other responsibilities?
- to be caring shepherds?
- to cope with the imperfections of others?

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COVER PICTURE:

Zechariah saw a vision of two olive trees supplying oil to a lampstand that had seven lamps (See study article 12, paragraph 6)

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