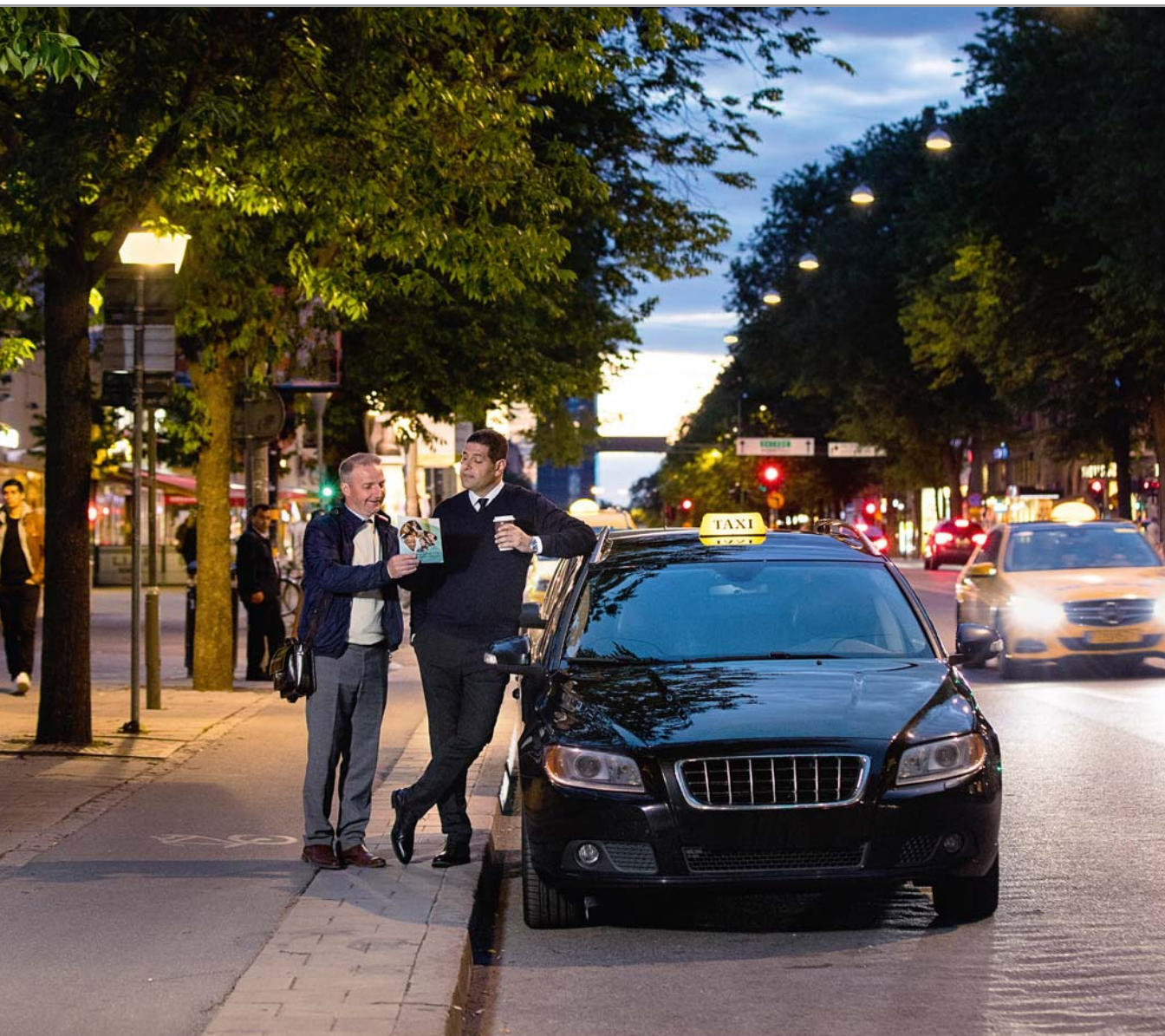


NOVEMBER 2018

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
DECEMBER 31, 2018–FEBRUARY 3, 2019



COVER IMAGE:
SWEDEN

Publishers in Stockholm take advantage of the Nordic summer light to do evening witnessing. They share a message of hope with taxi drivers, store clerks, service station attendants, and other night workers

PUBLISHERS
22,418

BIBLE STUDIES
10,027

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE (2017)
34,966

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“Buy Truth and Never Sell It”

“Buy truth and never sell it, also wisdom and discipline and understanding.”—PROV. 23:23.

WHAT is your most precious possession? Would you be willing to exchange it for something of lesser value? For Jehovah’s dedicated worshippers, the answers to these questions are simple. Our most precious possession is our relationship with Jehovah, and we would not trade it for anything. We also treasure Bible truth, which made cultivating that bond with our heavenly Father possible.—Col. 1:9, 10.

² Just think of all that our Grand Instructor teaches us in his Word, the Bible! He reveals the truth about his meaningful name and his appealing qualities. He informs us about the outstanding provision of the ransom, which he lovingly provided for us by means of his Son, Jesus. Jehovah also informs us about the Messianic Kingdom, and he sets before the anointed the heavenly hope and before the “other sheep” the hope of the earthly Paradise. (John 10:16) He teaches us how we should conduct ourselves. We treasure these truths

1, 2. (a) What is our most precious possession? (b) What truths do we treasure, and why? (See opening pictures.)

SONGS: 94, 96

CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

How can we buy truth from Jehovah?

Describe five things that may be included in the price we have to pay for obtaining truth.

How valuable should the truth be to us?

because they enable us to draw close to our Creator. They give meaning to our life.

³ Jehovah is a generous God. He does not hold back good from truth-seekers. Jehovah even provided the life of his dear Son as a free gift. God would certainly not require us to pay money for the truth. In fact, when a man named Simon offered the apostle Peter money in return for the authority to impart holy spirit, Peter rebuked him, saying: “May your silver perish with you, because you thought you could acquire the free gift of God with money.” (Acts 8:18-20) What, then, is the meaning of the inspired instruction: “Buy truth”?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO “BUY” TRUTH?

⁴ **Read Proverbs 23:23.** We do not find the truth in God’s Word without effort. We must be willing to make whatever sacrifices are needed to obtain it. As the wise writer of Proverbs notes, once we “buy,” or acquire, “truth,” we must be careful not to “sell,” or lose, it. Let us discuss what it means to “buy” truth and the price we may have to pay for it, so to speak. We can thereby deepen our appreciation for the truth and strengthen our resolve never to “sell” it. As we will see, buying truth is well worth the cost.

⁵ Even something that is free may come at a cost. The Hebrew word translated “buy” at Proverbs 23:23 can also mean “acquire.” Both words imply mak-

ing an effort or exchanging something for an item of value. We might illustrate the idea of buying truth this way. Let us say that a market advertises “Free Bananas.” Will those bananas miraculously appear on our table? No. We have to make the effort to go to the market to pick them up. Are the bananas free? Yes, but we must expend the effort and take the time to go to the market. Similarly, we do not need money to buy truth. However, we must make an effort to obtain it.

⁶ **Read Isaiah 55:1-3.** Jehovah’s words recorded by Isaiah shed further light on what it means to buy truth. In this Bible passage, Jehovah compares his word to water, milk, and wine. Like a drink of cool, clear water, God’s words of truth are refreshing. Also, just as milk strengthens us and helps children to grow, Jehovah’s nourishing words strengthen us and help us to grow spiritually. Further, Jehovah’s words are also like wine. In what way? In the Bible, wine is associated with rejoicing. (Ps. 104:15) So by telling his people to “buy wine,” Jehovah assures us that living according to his words will make us rejoice. (Ps. 19:8) What a beautiful way to illustrate the beneficial effects of learning and applying God’s words of truth! We could compare the effort to the price we pay. So, then, let us consider five things that we may have to pay to buy truth.

WHAT HAVE YOU GIVEN UP TO BUY TRUTH?

⁷ **Time.** This is a price everyone who buys truth must pay. It takes time to lis-

7, 8. (a) Why must we spend time to buy truth? (b) How much was one young student willing to pay, and what was the result?

-
3. What does buying truth not mean?
 4. In this article, what will we learn about the truth?
 - 5, 6. (a) How can we buy truth without money? Illustrate. (b) How does truth benefit us?

ten to the Kingdom message, read the Bible and Bible literature, have a personal Bible study, and prepare for and attend congregation meetings. We must ‘buy out,’ or take, that time from some other less important activity. **(Read Ephesians 5:15, 16 and footnote.)** How much time will it take for us to gain an accurate knowledge of basic Bible teachings? That depends on our circumstances. There is no limit to what we can learn about Jehovah’s wisdom, ways, and works. (Rom. 11:33) The first issue of the *Watch Tower* likened the truth to “a modest little flower” and stated: “Be not content with *one* flower of truth. Had one been sufficient there would have been no more. Gather ever, seek for more.” We might ask ourselves, ‘How big is my bouquet of truth?’ Even with an eternity of time, we can always learn more about Jehovah. Today, the important thing is that we use our time wisely so as to buy as much truth as our circumstances allow. Consider an example of someone who longed for truth.

⁸ Mariko,* a young Japanese woman, came to New York City, U.S.A., to attend school. At the time, she followed a religious movement that started in Japan in the late 1950’s. A pioneer sister met Mariko in the house-to-house ministry. When she began to learn Bible truth, her joy was so great that she asked the pioneer to study the Bible with her twice a week. In spite of having a busy school schedule and holding down a part-time job, Mariko immediately began to attend congregation meetings. She also stopped spending time on some social activities in order to buy out time to

learn the truth. Making such sacrifices contributed to her rapid spiritual progress. Within a year, she got baptized. Six months later, in 2006, she began to pioneer, and she is still serving as a pioneer.

⁹ **Material advantages.** To buy truth, we might have to give up a lucrative job or career. When the fishermen Peter and Andrew were invited by Jesus to become “fishers of men,” they “abandoned their nets.” (Matt. 4:18-20) Of course, most of those who learn the truth today cannot simply walk away from their jobs. They have Scriptural obligations. (1 Tim. 5:8) However, individuals who learn the truth must often change their attitude toward material things and adjust their priorities. Jesus stated this clearly when he said: “Stop storing up for yourselves treasures on the earth . . . Rather, store up for yourselves treasures in heaven.” (Matt. 6:19, 20) Consider the example of one young woman.

¹⁰ Maria was swinging a golf club even before she was old enough to go to school. She continued to develop her golfing skills during high school and eventually earned a university scholarship. Golf was her life, and her goal was to enjoy a lucrative career as a professional golfer. Then Maria started to study the Bible, and she loved the truths she was learning. She was pleased with the changes that the truth helped her make in her life. She said: “The more I adjusted my attitude and lifestyle to the Bible’s standards, the

9, 10. (a) How does buying truth affect our view of material things? (b) What prospects did one young woman give up, and how does she feel about it?

* Some names in this article have been changed.

happier I became.” Maria realized that it would be difficult for her to pursue both spiritual and material riches. (Matt. 6:24) She paid the price of giving up her lifelong goal of becoming a professional golfer and the prospects of gaining riches and fame. However, as a result of buying truth, she now serves as a pioneer and enjoys what she describes as “the happiest, most meaningful life possible.”

11 Personal relationships. When we choose to live according to Bible truth, our ties with friends and relatives may change. Why? Jesus prayed regarding his followers: “Sanctify them by means of the truth; your word is truth.” (John 17:17; ftn.) “Sanctify them” can also mean “set them apart.” When we accept the truth, we are set apart from the world because we no longer fit into its mold. People view us differently because our values have changed. We live by the standards of Bible truth. Though we do not want to cause division, some friends and close family members may distance themselves from us or even oppose our newfound faith. This does not surprise us. Jesus acknowledged: “Indeed, a man’s enemies will be those of his own household.” (Matt. 10:36) He also gave assurance that the rewards for buying truth far exceed any price we may pay.—**Read Mark 10:28-30.**

12 From his early years, a Jewish businessman named Aaron was taught that God’s name is not to be pronounced. However, Aaron had a thirst for truth.

11. When we buy truth, what may happen to some of our relationships?

12. What price did one Jewish man pay for truth?

He was thrilled when a Witness showed him that by combining vowel points with the four Hebrew consonants of God’s name, it could be pronounced “Jehovah.” Excitedly, he went to the synagogue to share his wonderful discovery with the rabbis. Their reaction was not what Aaron expected. Instead of sharing his joy of learning the truth about God’s name, they spit on him and treated him as an outcast. His family bonds became strained. Undaunted, he continued to buy truth and served as a bold Witness of Jehovah for the rest of his life. Like Aaron, in order to walk in the truth, we are willing to pay the price of accepting whatever changes may occur in our social status or family relationships.

13 Ungodly thinking and conduct. To accept the truth and live by the Bible’s moral standards, we must be willing to make changes in our thinking and conduct. Note what Peter wrote regarding these adjustments: “As obedient children, stop being molded by the desires you formerly had in your ignorance, but . . . become holy yourselves in all your conduct.” (1 Pet. 1:14, 15) For people in the morally corrupt city of Corinth, buying truth meant making major changes in their lifestyle. (1 Cor. 6:9-11) Likewise, to be able to buy truth, many today have turned their back on ungodly conduct. Peter further reminded Christians in his day: “The time that has passed by is sufficient for you to have done the will of the nations when you carried on in acts of brazen conduct, unbridled passions, overdrinking,

13, 14. What changes in our thinking and conduct are needed in order to buy truth? Give an example.

wild parties, drinking bouts, and lawless idolatries.”—1 Pet. 4:3.

¹⁴ For many years, Devynn and Jasmine were drunkards. Although Devynn was a skilled bookkeeper, his alcohol abuse prevented him from holding a permanent job. Jasmine was notorious for her aggressive, violent behavior. One day while walking drunk along the road, Jasmine met two Witness missionaries. The missionaries arranged for a Bible study, but when they arrived at Devynn’s home the next week, both Jasmine and Devynn were drunk. They had not expected the missionaries to care enough about them to come to their home. The situation was different the next time. From the first study, Jasmine and Devynn became diligent students of the Bible and started to apply what they were learning. Within three months, they decided to give up alcohol and later legalized their marriage. The changes they made became well-known, and this moved many others in their village to study the Bible.

¹⁵ **Unscriptural customs and practices.** Giving up unscriptural customs and practices can be one of the most difficult prices to pay for truth. Although some may find it easy to accept the Scriptural basis for abandoning these practices, others may hesitate to pay the price because of pressure from family members, workmates, and close friends. The situation may become emotionally charged, especially if a custom involves rites in honor of dead relatives. (Deut. 14:1) The courageous example of others can help us to make the necessary changes. Consider the bold action taken

15. What can be one of the most difficult prices to pay for truth, and why?

by some inhabitants of Ephesus in the first century.

¹⁶ Ephesus was renowned for its magical arts. What did newly converted Christians who had been practicing magical arts do in order to put away those unscriptural practices and buy truth? The Bible explains: “Quite a number of those who practiced magical arts brought their books together and burned them up before everybody. And they calculated their value and found them worth 50,000 pieces of silver. Thus in a mighty way, the word of Jehovah kept growing and prevailing.” (Acts 19:19, 20) The faithful Christians made this costly sacrifice and gained priceless blessings.

¹⁷ What did you pay for truth? We all spend time gathering flowers of truth. Some also pay for truth by forgoing material advantages and by dealing with adjustments in their personal relationships. Many have to make changes in their thinking and conduct and must give up unscriptural customs and practices. Whatever the cost, we are convinced that Bible truth is well worth any price we have to pay. It gives us our most precious possession, a close relationship with Jehovah. When we reflect on our blessings of knowing the truth, we find it difficult to imagine that anyone would want to sell it. How could that happen, and how can we avoid making such a grave mistake? We will consider these questions in the next article.

16. What did some in Ephesus do in order to buy truth?

17. (a) What things may be included in the price we have to pay for the truth? (b) What questions will we consider in the following article?



“I Will Walk in Your Truth”

*“Instruct me, O Jehovah, about your way.
I will walk in your truth.”—PS. 86:11.*

SONGS: 31, 72

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What could cause a Christian to “sell” the truth?

How can we avoid either drawing away from or drifting away from the truth?

What are three ways that we can strengthen our resolve to walk in the truth?

RETURNING an item that was purchased is a common practice. Estimates reveal that in some countries, buyers return nearly 9 percent of items purchased in stores. The return rate for items ordered online can be more than 30 percent. Perhaps the buyers found that the item did not meet their expectations, was defective, or was just not to their liking. So they decided to exchange the item or to ask for a refund.

² Although we might request a refund for material goods that we bought, we would never want to return, or “sell,” the “accurate knowledge” of Bible truth that we “buy.” (**Read Proverbs 23:23; 1 Tim. 2:4**) As we considered in the preceding article, we acquired the truth by spending much time to learn it. In addition, to buy the truth, we may have forgone a lucrative career, dealt with changes in our personal relationships and in our thinking and conduct, or given up unscriptural customs and practices. However, the price we paid is small in comparison to the blessings that we have received.

1-3. (a) How should we feel about Bible truth? Illustrate. (See opening pictures.) (b) What questions will we consider in this article?

³ When it comes to Bible truth, our feelings are similar to those of a man whom Jesus described in a brief illustration. To show how precious the truth of God's Kingdom is to those who find it, Jesus told about a traveling merchant who searched for fine pearls and found one. In fact, that pearl was of such high value that he "promptly sold" everything he had to buy it. (Matt. 13:45, 46) Similarly, the truth we found—the truth of God's Kingdom and all the other precious truths we learned from God's Word—is of such high value to us that we willingly and promptly made the sacrifices needed to obtain it. As long as we value the truth, we will "never sell it." Sadly, though, some of God's people have lost sight of the value of the truth they obtained—and have even sold it. May that never happen to us! To show that we deeply treasure the truth and that we would never sell it, we must heed the Bible's admonition to "go on walking in the truth." (**Read 3 John 2-4.**) To walk in the truth involves living it—giving it priority in our lives and conducting ourselves in harmony with it. Let us consider these questions: Why and how might some "sell" the truth? How can we avoid making that sad mistake? How can we strengthen our determination to "go on walking in the truth"?

WHY AND HOW SOME "SELL" THE TRUTH

⁴ In the first century, some who initially responded favorably to the teachings of Jesus failed to continue walking in the truth. For example, after a large crowd had been fed in a miraculous way

4. In the first century, why did some "sell" the truth?

by Jesus, the crowd followed him to the other side of the Sea of Galilee. There, Jesus said something that startled them: "Unless you eat the flesh of the Son of man and drink his blood, you have no life in yourselves." Instead of asking Jesus to explain, they were stumbled by his words and said: "This speech is shocking; who can listen to it?" As a result, "many of his disciples went off to the things behind and would no longer walk with him."—John 6: 53-66.

⁵ Sadly, some today have failed to hold on to the truth. Some were stumbled by an adjusted understanding of a Bible passage or by what a prominent brother said or did. Others were offended by Scriptural counsel they received, or they let go of the truth because of a personality clash with a fellow Christian. Still others took sides with apostates and other opposers who misrepresented our beliefs. As a result, some deliberately began "drawing away" from Jehovah and the congregation. (Heb. 3: 12-14) How much better it would have been if they had maintained their faith and kept their confidence in Jesus, as the apostle Peter did! When Jesus asked the apostles if they wanted to leave, Peter immediately replied: "Lord, whom shall we go away to? You have sayings of everlasting life."—John 6:67-69.

⁶ Others have left the truth gradually, perhaps without even noticing what was happening. A person who gradually leaves the truth is like a boat that slowly slips away from the riverbank. The Bible describes such a slow change as 'drifting

5, 6. (a) In recent times, why have some failed to hold on to the truth? (b) How might one gradually leave the truth?

away.’ (Heb. 2:1) Unlike one who intentionally draws away from the truth, one who drifts away does not do so deliberately. However, such a person strains his relationship with Jehovah and is in danger of losing it. How can we avoid such a tragic course?

HOW CAN WE AVOID SELLING THE TRUTH?

⁷ To walk in the truth, we must accept and obey *all* of Jehovah’s sayings. We must give the truth priority in our lives and live according to Bible principles. In prayer to Jehovah, King David declared: “I *will* walk in your truth.” (Ps. 86:11) David was determined. We too must be firmly resolved to keep walking in God’s truth. If we are not, we could have second thoughts about what we paid for the truth and perhaps be tempted to begin taking back part of the payment. Rather, we carefully hold on to the complete truth. We recognize that we cannot pick which truths to accept and which to ignore. After all, we must walk in “*all* the truth.” (John 16:13) Let us reflect on five things that we may have paid for the truth. Doing so will strengthen our resolve not to be lured into taking back even part of our payment.—Matt. 6:19.

⁸ **Time.** To avoid drifting away from the truth, we must make wise use of our time. If we are not careful, we might start to spend excessive amounts of time on recreation, hobbies, browsing the Internet, or watching television. Although these things are not wrong in them-

selves, the time we spend on them can begin to encroach on time previously spent in personal study and other spiritual activities. Consider what happened to a Christian sister named Emma.* From the time of her youth, Emma had a passion for horses. Whenever she had the chance, she went horseback riding. After a while, she began to feel uneasy about all the time she spent on her hobby. She made adjustments and eventually succeeded in keeping recreation in its proper place. She was also encouraged by the experience of Cory Wells, a former rodeo trick rider.[#] Emma now enjoys spending more time in spiritual activities and with her Christian family and friends. She feels closer to Jehovah and is at peace, knowing that she is using her time wisely.

⁹ **Material Advantages.** If we are to continue walking in the truth, we must keep material things in their proper place. When we learned the truth, our interest in material things became secondary to our spiritual pursuits. We were happy to make material sacrifices in order to walk in the truth. Over time, however, we may see others buying the latest electronic devices or enjoying other material advantages. We could begin to feel that we are losing out. No longer content with the necessities, we might put spiritual pursuits aside in favor of accumulating material possessions. Such a course reminds us of Demas. His love for “the present sys-

* Name has been changed.

[#] Go to JW Broadcasting, and look under INTERVIEWS AND EXPERIENCES > TRUTH TRANSFORMS LIVES.

7. What initial step will help us to avoid selling the truth?

8. How could unwise use of time cause a Christian to drift away from the truth? Give an example.

9. How could seeking material advantages cause some to put aside spiritual pursuits?

tem of things” led him to abandon a life of service with the apostle Paul. (2 Tim. 4:10) Why did Demas leave Paul? Whether he loved material things more than spiritual activities or he was no longer willing to make personal sacrifices in order to serve with Paul, the Bible does not say. We surely do not want to rekindle a desire for material things and let those attractions crowd out our love for the truth.

10 Personal relationships. To continue walking in the truth, we must not give in to pressure from others. When we started to walk in the truth, our relationship with non-Witness associates and family members changed. Some were tolerant; others became outright opposers. (1 Pet. 4:4) Although we endeavor to have good relations with family members and treat them kindly, we must be careful not to compromise the truth to please them. We will continue to try to get along well with family members. In view of the clear warning at 1 Corinthians 15:33, we will have close friendships only with those who love Jehovah.

11 Ungodly thinking and conduct. All who walk in the truth must be holy. (Isa. 35:8; **read 1 Peter 1:14-16.**) When coming into the truth, all of us had to make adjustments to conform to the Bible’s righteous standards. Some had to undergo major changes. Whichever the case, we must never trade our pure, holy condition for the immoral filth of this world. How can we avoid succumbing to immoral conduct? Reflect on the high

price that Jehovah paid in order for us to be holy—the precious blood of his Son, Jesus Christ. (1 Pet. 1:18, 19) To maintain our clean standing before Jehovah, we need to keep the value of Jesus’ ransom sacrifice foremost in our mind and heart.

12 Unscriptural customs and practices. Family members, workmates, and schoolmates may try to get us to join them in their celebrations. How can we resist the pressure to conform to customs and holidays that do not honor Jehovah? We can do so by keeping Jehovah’s view of such practices clearly in mind. Reviewing discussions printed in our publications that show the origin of popular holidays can be helpful. When we remind ourselves of the Scriptural reasons for not participating in such holidays, we are convinced that we are walking in the way that “is acceptable to the Lord.” (Eph. 5:10) Trusting in Jehovah and his Word of truth will protect us from “trembling at men.”—Prov. 29:25.

13 Walking in the truth is an ongoing process, a path that we hope to follow throughout eternity. How can we strengthen our determination to go on walking in the truth? Let us consider three ways.

STRENGTHEN YOUR RESOLVE TO WALK IN THE TRUTH

14 First, continue to study the precious truths of God’s Word and meditate on them. Yes, buy truth by regularly

10. To go on walking in the truth, what pressure must we resist?

11. How can we avoid unscriptural practices?

12, 13. (a) Why is it vital to maintain Jehovah’s view of holidays? (b) What will we consider next?

14. (a) How will continuing to buy truth strengthen our resolve never to sell it? (b) Why are wisdom, discipline, and understanding essential?

setting aside time to feed on the precious truths of God's Word. You will thus deepen your appreciation for the truth and strengthen your resolve never to sell it. In addition to buying truth, Proverbs 23:23 says that we should also buy "wisdom and discipline and understanding." Knowledge alone is not enough. We must put the truth to work in our lives. With understanding, we discern the harmony of all of Jehovah's sayings. Wisdom moves us to act on what we know. At times, the truth disciplines us, showing us where we need to make changes. May we always be responsive to such guidance. Its value is far more than silver.—Prov. 8:10.

¹⁵ Second, be firmly resolved to live in harmony with the truth day by day. Wear the belt of truth around your waist. (Eph. 6:14) In Bible times, the belt of a soldier supported and protected his waist and his internal organs. For his belt to provide protection, however, it had to be tight. A loose belt gave little support. How does our spiritual belt of truth protect us? If we keep it wrapped tightly around us like a belt, the truth will guard us from faulty reasoning and will help us to make sound decisions. When we are tempted or under trial, Bible truth will strengthen our resolve to do what is right. Just as a sol-

15. How does the belt of truth protect us?

dier would never have thought of going into battle without his belt, we must be determined never to loosen or remove our belt of truth. Rather, we do all we can to keep it tight around our body by living in harmony with the truth. Another function of the soldier's belt was that it furnished a convenient place to suspend his sword. That brings us to the next way to strengthen our determination to go on walking in the truth.

¹⁶ Third, have as full a share as possible in teaching Bible truth to others. In this way you will keep a firm grip on our spiritual sword, which is "God's word." (Eph. 6:17) All of us can strive to improve our skills as teachers, "handling the word of the truth aright." (2 Tim. 2:15) As we use the Bible to help others to buy truth and reject falsehoods, we embed God's sayings in our own mind and heart. In this way, we strengthen our determination to go on walking in the truth.

¹⁷ The truth is a precious gift from Jehovah. By means of this gift, we have our most prized possession, our intimate relationship with our heavenly Father. What he has taught us until now is only the beginning! God has promised us an eternity to add to the truth we have already bought. Therefore, cherish the truth like a fine pearl. Continue to "buy truth and never sell it." Then, like David, you will carry out this promise to Jehovah: "I will walk in your truth." —Ps. 86:11.

16. How does sharing the truth with others strengthen our determination to go on walking in the truth?

17. Why is the truth precious to you?

The Truth

Learn it. Live it.
Teach it.

(See paragraphs 14-16)



Trust in Jehovah and Live!

“Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding.”—PROV. 3:5.

WE ALL need comfort. Perhaps worries, disappointments, and afflictions have become part of our life. We may be struggling with heartaches resulting from advancing age, disease, or the loss of a loved one. Some of us are subjected to hostility. Escalating violence surrounds us. True, we are convinced that these “critical times hard to deal with” are evidence that we are living “in the last days” and that each passing day brings us one step closer to the new world. (2 Tim. 3:1) Still, we may have been waiting for a long time to see the fulfillment of Jehovah’s promises, and our difficulties may be increasing. So where can we find comfort?

² To find the answer, let us examine the book of Habakkuk. Though the Scriptures do not provide specific details about Habakkuk’s life and activity, the book that bears his name is a source of encouragement. His name probably means “Ardent

1. Why do we all need comfort?

2, 3. (a) What do we know about Habakkuk? (b) Why will we consider the book of Habakkuk?

SONGS: 3, 8

DO YOU REMEMBER?

Why can we tell Jehovah our concerns?

What should our prayers include?

Why is waiting on Jehovah so important?

Embrace.” This could refer to Jehovah’s comforting embrace or to the way his worshippers confidently cling to him. Habakkuk spoke to God, asking probing questions. In effect, he asked questions on our behalf, since Jehovah inspired Habakkuk to write down the conversation.—Hab. 2:2.

³ This intimate dialogue between the distraught man of God and Jehovah is all the Scriptures reveal about the prophet. His book is part of “all the things that were written beforehand” and that are preserved in God’s Word, the Bible, “so that through our endurance and through the comfort from the Scriptures we might have hope.” (Rom. 15:4) How can we personally benefit from the book of Habakkuk? It can help us to see what it means to trust in Jehovah. Further, Habakkuk’s prophecy assures us that it is possible to acquire and maintain a calm heart despite our afflictions and problems. With that in mind, let us consider the book of Habakkuk in more detail.

CALL ON JEHOVAH

⁴ **Read Habakkuk 1:2, 3.** Habakkuk lived during a very difficult and challenging time. He was deeply saddened because he was surrounded by wicked, violent people. When would their wickedness end? Why did Jehovah take so long before acting? All Habakkuk saw was injustice and oppression practiced by his own countrymen. He felt helpless. So in the midst of this dark period, he called on Jehovah to intervene. Habakkuk may have started to imagine that Jehovah was not concerned. It

seemed that God would not act soon enough. Can you identify with the feelings of this dear servant of God?

⁵ Had Habakkuk lost trust in Jehovah? Did he fail to maintain his faith in God’s promises? By no means! The mere fact that he entrusted his problems and concerns to Jehovah and not to humans shows that he had not given up in despair. He was obviously troubled because he could not understand God’s timing or the reason why Jehovah allowed him to be in such a painful situation. By inspiring Habakkuk to write down his concerns, Jehovah provided us with an important object lesson: We must not be afraid to tell Him about our concerns or doubts. Indeed, he kindly invites us to pour out our heart to him in prayer. (Ps. 50:15; 62:8) Proverbs 3:5 adds the encouragement to “trust in Jehovah with all [our] heart” and not to “rely on [our] own understanding.” Habakkuk likely knew these words and took them to heart.

⁶ Habakkuk took the initiative to draw close to Jehovah, his trusted Friend and Father. Habakkuk did not just fret over his situation, relying on his own understanding. Instead, he prayed about his feelings and worries, setting a good example for us. Moreover, Jehovah, the Hearer of prayer, invites us to show our trust by prayerfully sharing our concerns with him. (Ps. 65:2) Doing so will help us to experience Jehovah’s response—his warm embrace by means of his kind guidance. (Ps. 73:23, 24) He will help us to know his thoughts no matter

5. What important lesson is found in the book of Habakkuk? (See opening picture.)

6. Why is prayer important?

4. Why was Habakkuk distraught?

what afflicts us. Our heartfelt prayers are one of the deepest expressions of our trust in God.

LISTEN TO JEHOVAH

7 Read Habakkuk 1:5-7. After leaving his worries and concerns in Jehovah's hands, Habakkuk may have wondered how Jehovah would react. As an empathetic and understanding Father, Jehovah did not rebuke him for his sincere complaint. God knew that it was a desperate cry of pain and sorrow. In words really aimed at the wayward Jews, Jehovah informed Habakkuk of what would happen in the near future. It could well be that Habakkuk was the first to whom Jehovah revealed that the end of that violent era was very near.

8 Jehovah showed Habakkuk that He was ready to act. The punishment of that violent and wicked generation was imminent. By the expression "in your days," Jehovah indicated that this judgment would definitely occur during the lifetime of the prophet or that of his contemporaries. Jehovah's reply was not at all what Habakkuk expected. Was this the answer to his impatient cry? What Jehovah told him surely meant that suffering would increase for all of Judah.* The Chaldeans (Babylonians) were ruthless and brutal, more violent than Habakkuk's own people, who at least knew Jehovah's standards. Why would Jehovah use this cruel pagan nation to bring calamity on his

* Habakkuk 1:5 uses the plural "you," indicating that this calamity would befall all of Judah.

7. How did Jehovah react to Habakkuk's worries?

8. Why did Jehovah's response puzzle Habakkuk?

people? How would you have reacted after hearing this divine response?

9 Read Habakkuk 1:12-14, 17. Habakkuk understood that Jehovah would use Babylon to judge and punish the evil-doers surrounding him, but he was still perplexed. Yet, he humbly told Jehovah that He continued to be his "Rock." (Deut. 32:4; Isa. 26:4) Habakkuk would patiently continue to trust in God's love and kindness. The prophet's resolve gave him the confidence to appeal to Jehovah again. Why would God allow conditions in Judah to get even worse? Why would he not act right away? Why would the Almighty tolerate even more distress? Why would he "keep silent" when wickedness took over? He is the "Holy One"; his "eyes are too pure to look on what is evil."

10 At times, we may feel as did Habakkuk. We listen to Jehovah. With full trust, we read and study his Word, and this gives us hope. We hear about his promises through the instruction that his organization provides. But we still may wonder, 'When will our afflictions end?' What can we learn from what Habakkuk did next?

WAIT ON JEHOVAH

11 Read Habakkuk 2:1. Habakkuk's conversation with Jehovah gave him a calm heart. So he resolved to keep waiting confidently on Jehovah to act. This was not just a spur-of-the-moment reaction, for he repeated his resolve when

9. What questions may Habakkuk have asked himself?

10. How might we at times feel as did Habakkuk?

11. What did Habakkuk resolve to do after listening to Jehovah?

he later said that he would “quietly wait for the day of distress.” (Hab. 3:16) Other faithful servants of God displayed the same patient trust, encouraging us not to give up waiting on Jehovah to act.—Mic. 7:7; Jas. 5:7, 8.

¹² What does Habakkuk’s resolve teach us? First, we must never stop praying to Jehovah, no matter what trials befall us. Second, we need to listen to what Jehovah tells us through his Word and organization. Third, we should patiently wait on Jehovah, fully trusting that he will relieve our pains in his own time. If we continue to talk intimately with Jehovah and listen to him with a waiting attitude, as Habakkuk did, we too will gain a calm heart, which will help us to endure. Our hope will strengthen our patience, which in turn will help us to rejoice despite all the adversities we may face. Hope gives us confidence that our heavenly Father will act.—Rom. 12:12.

¹³ **Read Habakkuk 2:3.** Jehovah surely was pleased with Habakkuk’s decision to wait. The Almighty was fully aware of Habakkuk’s dire circumstances. Therefore, God provided consolation by lovingly and gently assuring the prophet that he would receive answers to his sincere questions. Relief for all his worries would come before too long. God, in effect, told Habakkuk: “Be patient, trust in me. My answer will come despite the apparent delay!” Jehovah reminded him that He had an appointed time for fulfilling His promises. He counseled Habakkuk to wait for the accomplishment of His purposes. Ulti-

mately, the prophet would not be disappointed.

¹⁴ Patiently waiting on Jehovah and paying close attention to what he tells us will give us confidence and will help us to acquire a calm heart despite adversities and hardships. Jesus confirmed that we can trust in Jehovah as the Great Timekeeper, not focusing on “times or seasons” that God has not yet revealed. (Acts 1:7) Therefore, may we not give up but wait in humility, faith, and patience, making good use of the time we have to serve Jehovah to the best of our abilities.—Mark 13:35-37; Gal. 6:9.

TRUSTING IN JEHOVAH RESULTS IN LIFE AND A GLORIOUS FUTURE

¹⁵ To the righteous who trust in him, Jehovah has promised: “The righteous one will live by his faithfulness,” and “the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of Jehovah.” (Hab. 2:4, 14) Yes, those who patiently trust in God will be rewarded with life.

¹⁶ At first glance, the promise found at Habakkuk 2:4 might seem to be merely a general statement. However, the apostle Paul saw Jehovah’s assurance as so significant that he quoted this verse three times! (Rom. 1:17; Gal. 3:11; Heb. 10:38) Whatever difficulties the righteous one may suffer, he will by his faith and trust live to see the fulfillment of God’s purposes. Jehovah tells us to look beyond the present.

14. What should be our resolve in times of trouble?

15, 16. (a) What powerful promises can we find in the book of Habakkuk? (b) What do these promises teach us?

12. What are some lessons we learn from Habakkuk?

13. What kind assurance do we find at Habakkuk 2:3?



Why are we resolved to serve Jehovah to the best of our abilities? (See paragraph 14)

¹⁷ The book of Habakkuk provides a powerful lesson for all of us living in these last days. Jehovah extends his promise of life to any righteous person who displays faith and trust in Him. Let us continue to strengthen our faith and trust in God, no matter what distress and anxiety we face. Through Habakkuk, Jehovah assures us that He will support and deliver us. He kindly asks us to trust in him and to wait patiently for his appointed time when, under God's Kingdom, the whole earth will be filled with his happy and mild-tempered worshippers.—Matt. 5:5; Heb. 10:36-39.

JOYFULLY TRUST IN JEHOVAH

¹⁸ **Read Habakkuk 3:16-19.** Jehovah's words had a profound effect on Habakkuk. He meditated on Jehovah's awe-inspiring past actions in behalf of his people. Now he was able to renew his trust. He knew that Jehovah would act soon! That comforted the prophet, even though he knew that his own suffering might continue for a time. Habakkuk's honest doubt changed into unshakable,

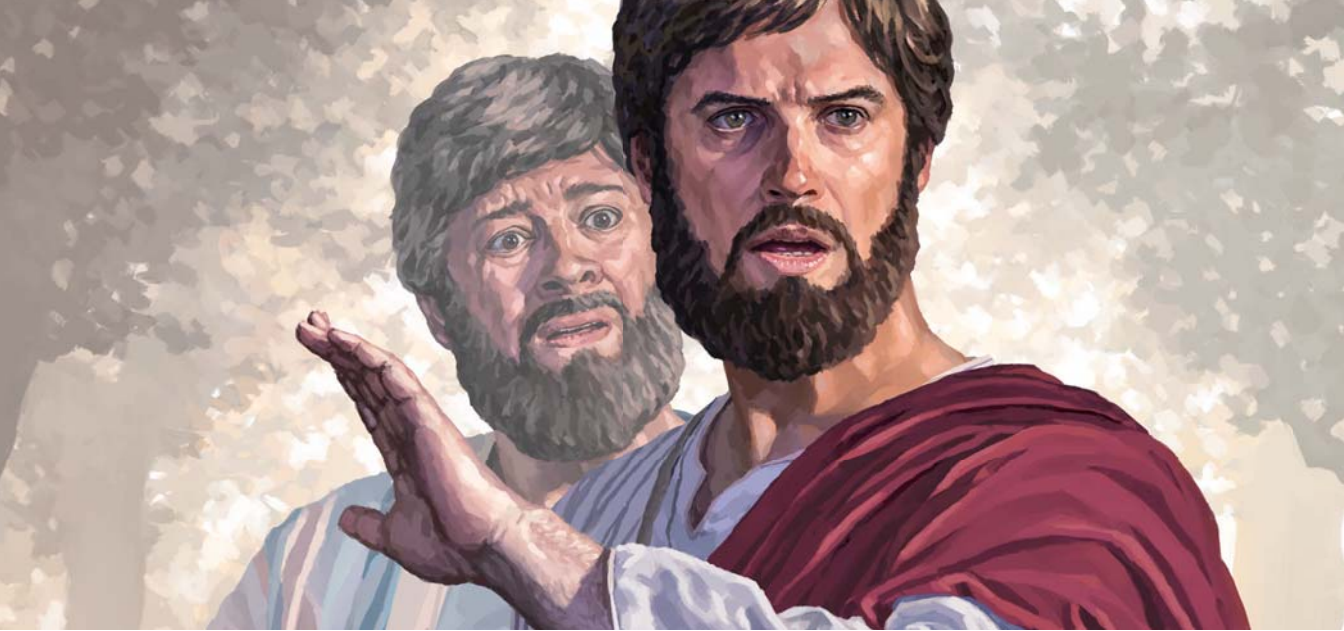
joyous trust in Jehovah's saving power. He uttered what may be one of the most memorable expressions of confidence ever expressed by a human. Some scholars think that verse 18 literally means "I will jump for joy in the Lord; I will spin round for delight in God." What a powerful assurance for all of us! Not only has Jehovah given us wonderful promises but he has assured us that he is swiftly working out his great purpose.

¹⁹ No doubt, the vital message of Habakkuk is to trust in Jehovah. (Hab. 2:4) We can acquire and maintain such trust if we strengthen our relationship with Jehovah by (1) persevering in prayer, telling Jehovah all about our anxieties and concerns; (2) paying careful attention to Jehovah's Word and any direction we receive through his organization; and (3) faithfully and patiently waiting on Jehovah. That is what Habakkuk did. Though he began his book with grief, he ended with a confident and joyful exclamation. May we follow this inspiring example so that we too can feel Jehovah's fatherly embrace! What greater comfort could we find in this darkening world?

17. What assurances does the book of Habakkuk give us?

18. How did Jehovah's words affect Habakkuk?

19. How can we find the same comfort as did Habakkuk?



Who Molds Your Thinking?

“Stop being molded by this system of things.”—ROM. 12:2.

SONGS: 88, 45

CAN YOU ANSWER?

Why is Jehovah’s thinking beneficial for us?

Why is Jehovah’s thinking superior to the ideas and values of this world?

To avoid being molded by this system, what must we do?

JESUS’ disciples could not believe what they were hearing. Jesus, the one they expected to restore Israel’s kingdom, said that he would soon suffer and die. It was the apostle Peter who spoke up. “Be kind to yourself, Lord,” he said. “You will not have this happen to you at all.” Jesus countered: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a stumbling block to me, because you think, not God’s thoughts, but those of men.” —Matt. 16:21-23; Acts 1:6.

² With those words, Jesus made a distinction between thoughts that originate with God and thoughts that originate with this world under Satan’s control. (1 John 5:19) Peter echoed the self-sparing attitude of the world. But Jesus knew that his Father’s thinking was different. He knew that God wanted him to brace himself for the suffering and death that awaited him. In his reply to Peter, Jesus clearly rejected the world’s thinking in favor of Jehovah’s.

1, 2. (a) What was Jesus’ response to Peter’s advice to be kind to himself? (See opening picture.) (b) Why did Jesus respond in that way?

³ What about us? Do we think God's thoughts or those of this world? Granted, we have likely conformed our conduct to God's requirements. But what about our thinking? Are we bringing our thoughts and viewpoints into alignment with Jehovah's? Doing so requires a deliberate effort. On the other hand, little or no effort is needed to absorb the world's thinking. That is because the spirit of the world is all around us. (Eph. 2:2) Furthermore, because it often appeals to self-interest, the world's way of thinking can be enticing. Yes, it is challenging to think like Jehovah but all too easy to think like the world.

⁴ However, if we allow the world to mold our thinking, we will be inclined toward selfishness and a desire for moral independence. (Mark 7:21, 22) It is therefore vital that we cultivate "God's thoughts," not "those of men." This article will help us. It considers reasons why aligning our thoughts with Jehovah's is not overly restrictive but beneficial. It also shows us how we can resist being molded by the thinking of the world. The next article examines how we can get Jehovah's thinking on various matters and make his thoughts our own.

JEHOVAH'S THINKING IS BENEFICIAL AND DESIRABLE

⁵ Some people resist the idea of having *anyone* mold or influence their thoughts. "I think for myself," they say.

3. Why is it challenging to reject the world's thinking in favor of Jehovah's?

4. (a) What will happen if we let the world mold our thinking? (b) How will this article help us?

5. Why do some resist the idea of being molded by anyone?

They probably mean that they make their own decisions and that it is proper to do so. They do not wish to be controlled, nor do they want to surrender their individuality.*

⁶ We can be assured, however, that bringing our thinking into harmony with Jehovah's does not mean giving up all individual thought or expression. As stated at 2 Corinthians 3:17, "where the spirit of Jehovah is, there is freedom." We are free to develop our own distinct personalities. We can have our personal preferences and choose our fields of interest. Indeed, Jehovah designed us to do so. However, we cannot use our freedom without restraint. **(Read 1 Peter 2:16.)** When it comes to issues of right and wrong, Jehovah wants us to be guided by his thinking as revealed in his Word. Is this overly restrictive, or is it beneficial?

⁷ Consider an illustration. Parents endeavor to instill in their children good values. They may teach them to be honest, industrious, and considerate of others. This is not overly restrictive. Rather, the parents are preparing them for a successful life as independent adults. When the children grow up and leave home, they will be free to make their own choices. If they choose to live within the values that

* In reality, even the most independent of thinkers cannot avoid being influenced. Whether contemplating something so profound as the origin of life or simply deciding what to wear, people are to some degree affected by others. We can, however, choose whom we will allow to influence us.

6. (a) What freedom does Jehovah allow us? (b) Is this freedom absolute?

7, 8. Why will cultivating Jehovah's view of matters not be overly restrictive? Illustrate.

they learned from their parents, they will be more likely to make decisions that they will not later regret. As a result, they will be free from many self-induced troubles and anxieties.

⁸ Like a good parent, Jehovah wants his children to have the most fulfilling life possible. (Isa. 48:17, 18) He therefore provides basic principles for moral conduct and for behavior toward others. In such matters he invites us to cultivate his very way of thinking and to share his values. Far from constraining us, this enhances, elevates, and expands our thinking ability. (Ps. 92:5; Prov. 2:1-5; Isa. 55:9) It helps us make choices that lead to happiness while still allowing us to blossom as individuals. (Ps. 1:2, 3) Yes, thinking like Jehovah is beneficial and desirable!

JEHOVAH'S THINKING IS SUPERIOR

⁹ Another reason why Jehovah's worshippers desire to align their thinking with God's is that his thinking is far superior to that of this world. Segments of the world have offered advice on moral conduct, family relationships, job satisfaction, and other aspects of life. Much of it is out of harmony with Jehovah's thinking. For example, self-promotion is often encouraged. So is tolerance of sexual immorality. Separation and divorce for frivolous reasons are sometimes advised as a means of achieving greater happiness. Such advice is in conflict with the Scriptures. Still, might some of it be more suited to our times?

¹⁰ "Wisdom is proved righteous by its works," said Jesus. (Matt. 11:19) The

world has made considerable advancement in technology; however, it has been unable to solve the major problems that stand in the way of happiness, such as war, racism, and crime. And what of its lenient view of morality? Many people acknowledge that this is, not solving, but contributing to family breakdown, illness, and other troubles. On the other hand, Christians who adopt God's viewpoint are enjoying improved family relationships, the healthful benefits of moral cleanness, and peace among fellow believers on a worldwide scale. (Isa. 2:4; Acts 10:34, 35; 1 Cor. 6:9-11) Does this not show that Jehovah's thinking is superior to that of the world?

¹¹ True worshippers of Bible record recognized the superiority of Jehovah's thoughts. Even though Moses, for example, was educated "in all the wisdom of the Egyptians," he looked to God for "a heart of wisdom." (Acts 7:22; Ps. 90:12) He also petitioned Jehovah: "Make me know your ways." (Ex. 33:13) Being guided by Jehovah's thoughts, he had a meaningful share in the outworking of His purpose and is honorably mentioned in the Scriptures as a man of outstanding faith.—Heb. 11:24-27.

¹² The apostle Paul was an intelligent and learned man, knowing at least two languages. (Acts 5:34; 21:37, 39; 22:2, 3) Yet, when it came to matters of principle, he rejected worldly wisdom. Instead, he based his reasoning on the Scriptures. (**Read Acts 17:2; 1 Corinthians 2:6, 7, 13.**) As a result,

11. Whose thinking guided Moses, and what was the outcome?

12. On what did the apostle Paul base his reasoning?

9, 10. How has Jehovah's thinking proved superior to that of the world?

Paul enjoyed a successful ministry and anticipated an eternal reward.—2 Tim. 4:8.

¹³ Certainly, God's thinking is superior to that of today's world. Living by his thoughts will bring us the greatest happiness and success. But Jehovah will not force his thinking on us. "The faithful and discreet slave" does not exercise control over the thoughts of individuals, and neither do the elders. (Matt. 24:45; 2 Cor. 1:24) Rather, each Christian has the personal responsibility to bring his or her thinking into harmony with God's. How can we do that?

AVOID BEING MOLDED BY THIS SYSTEM

¹⁴ At Romans 12:2, we are counseled: "Stop being molded by this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, so that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God." Those inspired words show that whatever molded our thinking before we learned the truth, it is possible to bring our thoughts into closer harmony with God's. True, our thinking has to some extent been influenced by hereditary factors and past experiences. But the mind is flexible and can keep changing. To a large extent, any such changes will be determined by what we allow into our mind and what we choose to dwell on. By dwelling or meditating on Jehovah's way of thinking, we can prove to ourselves that his

13. Who has the responsibility to bring our thinking into alignment with Jehovah's?

14, 15. (a) In order to think like Jehovah, on what must we meditate? (b) In the light of Romans 12:2, why must we avoid taking in the world's ideas? Illustrate.

viewpoints are right. It will then be our natural desire to bring our thoughts into alignment with his.

¹⁵ Note, however, that in order to make our mind over to Jehovah's way of thinking, we need to "stop being molded by this system." We must stop taking into our minds ideas or viewpoints that are in opposition to God's. The importance of this preliminary step can be illustrated with food. A person might seek to improve his health by eating food that is nutritious. But of what value would that be if he is also ingesting regular doses of contaminated food? Similarly, feeding on Jehovah's thoughts will be of limited value if we are corrupting our mind with worldly ideas.

¹⁶ Can we avoid all contact with the world's thinking? No, we cannot literally get out of the world. Some exposure to its ideas is inescapable. (1 Cor. 5:9, 10) The preaching work itself will bring us in contact with erroneous beliefs. However, where contact with ungodly views is unavoidable, we certainly need not entertain them or accept them. Like Jesus, we should be quick to reject thoughts that serve Satan's purpose. Furthermore, we can protect ourselves from unnecessary exposure to the world's thinking.—**Read Proverbs 4:23.**

¹⁷ For example, we should exercise caution when choosing our close friends. The Bible warns that if we keep close company with people who do not

16. From what do we need to protect ourselves?

17. What are some ways we can avoid unnecessary exposure to the world's thinking?



Do we help our children to reject harmful entertainment?
(See paragraphs 18, 19)

worship Jehovah, their thinking will rub off on us. (Prov. 13:20; 1 Cor. 15:12, 32, 33) We can also be selective when choosing entertainment. By rejecting entertainment that promotes the theory of evolution, violence, or immorality, we avoid poisoning our thinking with ideas that are “against the knowledge of God.”—2 Cor. 10:5.

¹⁸ We also do well to recognize and reject worldly thinking when it is presented in less obvious ways. For example, a news report might be angled in such a way so as to favor certain political opinions. A human interest story might advance the world’s view of human goals and achievements. Some movies and books promote the “me first” and “family first” philosophies, making them seem reasonable, appealing, even right. Such viewpoints overlook the Scriptural view that our families and self-worth

thrive when we love Jehovah above all. (Matt. 22:36-39) Also, some children’s stories, though otherwise unobjectionable, may subtly lay the groundwork for accepting immoral behavior.

¹⁹ This does not mean that it is wrong to enjoy wholesome entertainment. Still, we do well to ask ourselves these questions: ‘Do we recognize the world’s teachings even when they are promoted indirectly? Do we limit our children’s exposure—and even our own—to certain programs or reading material? Do we counteract worldly ideas heard or seen by our children with Jehovah’s view of matters?’ By recognizing the difference between God’s thinking and that of the world, we can avoid “being molded by this system of things.”

WHO IS MOLDING YOU NOW?

²⁰ Remember, there are basically two sources of information—Jehovah and the world under Satan’s control. By which source are we being molded? The answer is, the source from which we obtain information. If we take in the world’s ideas, these will mold our thinking, inclining us toward fleshly points of view and behavior. That is why it is vital that we guard what we allow our minds to dwell on.

²¹ As mentioned earlier, to think like Jehovah, we must do more than keep our minds free from corrupting influences. We must also feed on God’s thoughts with a view to making them our own. The following article will further consider how we can do that.

18, 19. (a) Why must we be on guard against worldly viewpoints promoted in subtle ways? (b) What questions should we ask ourselves, and why?

20. What will determine whether we are influenced by God’s thinking or that of the world?

21. What vital aspect will be discussed in the next article?



Are You Making Jehovah's Thoughts Your Own?

“Be transformed by making your mind over.”—ROM. 12:2.

A SMALL child receives a gift. His parents tell him, “Say thank you.” The child obeys, though somewhat mechanically. As he grows older, his appreciation for his parents’ thinking and for the kindness of others increases. Now he expresses thanks more readily, from the heart. Why? Because gratitude has become part of his own thinking.

² Similarly, when we first came to a knowledge of the truth, we learned the importance of obedience to Jehovah’s basic requirements. But as we continue to grow spiritually, we learn more about Jehovah’s thinking—his likes, his dislikes, and his way of viewing various matters. By learning to reason similarly and by allowing such thinking to influence our actions and personal choices, we show that we are making Jehovah’s thoughts our own.

³ While learning to think like Jehovah is a delight, it can also be a challenge. At times, our imperfect reasoning might get in the way. For example, we might have difficulty understanding Jehovah’s view of moral cleanness, materialism,

- 1, 2. As we develop spiritually, what do we learn to do? Illustrate.
3. Why can it be challenging to make Jehovah’s thoughts our own?

SONGS: 56, 123

CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

How are Bible study and meditation related to making Jehovah’s thoughts our own?

Jehovah’s thinking should have what effect on our actions?

How can meditating on God’s thoughts help us with future decisions?

the preaching work, the misuse of blood, or something else. What can we do? How can we continue to make progress in making God's thoughts our own? And how should doing so affect our present and future actions?

ADOPTING GOD'S THOUGHTS AS OUR OWN

4 Read Romans 12:2. The apostle Paul here describes what is involved in learning to think like Jehovah. The preceding article helped us to appreciate that in order to “stop being molded by this system of things,” we must refuse to feed on worldly viewpoints and attitudes. But Paul also mentioned the need for us to ‘make our mind over.’ This involves studying God's Word with a view to grasping his thoughts, meditating on them, and bringing our thinking into alignment with God's thinking.

5 Study is more than superficial reading and involves much more than merely highlighting the answers to study questions. When we study, we consider what the material tells us about Jehovah, his ways, and his thinking. We try to understand *why* God commands one thing and condemns another. We also give thought to what changes we need to make in our life and in our thinking. Although all these aspects might not be considered in every session of study, we profit by spending time—perhaps half of each study period—meditating appreciatively on what we read.—Ps. 119:97; 1 Tim. 4:15.

4. What is involved in following Paul's admonition: ‘Make your mind over’?

5. Explain the difference between superficial reading and study.

6 As we meditate regularly on God's Word, something extraordinary happens. We ‘prove to ourselves,’ yes, convince ourselves, that Jehovah's reasoning on matters is perfect. We begin to see things from his point of view, and we come to agree with that viewpoint. Our minds are ‘made over,’ and we develop a new pattern of thinking. Progressively, we make Jehovah's thoughts our own.

OUR THOUGHTS AFFECT OUR ACTIONS

7 Let us not conclude that thinking is just mental exercise. Thinking and actions work together. (Mark 7:21-23; Jas. 2:17) This can better be appreciated if we consider a few examples. The Gospels, for instance, give us clear indications of Jehovah's thinking with regard to material things. God handpicked the human parents who would raise his Son—a couple who were of modest material means. (Lev. 12:8; Luke 2:24) When Jesus was born, Mary “laid him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the lodging place.” (Luke 2:7) Had Jehovah wanted to, he could in any number of ways have provided better accommodations for the birth of his Son. What mattered to Him, though, was the spiritual environment in which Jesus would be cared for and raised.

8 From this Bible account about Jesus' birth, we can appreciate Jehovah's view of material things. Some parents insist on the best for their children materially, even at the expense of their chil-

6. What happens when we meditate on Jehovah's thoughts?

7, 8. (a) What is Jehovah's view of material prosperity? (See opening pictures.) (b) If we adopt his view, to what will we always give priority?

dren's spiritual health. Clearly, though, Jehovah considers spiritual matters to be of supreme importance. Have you adopted Jehovah's view? What do your actions reveal?—**Read Hebrews 13:5.**

⁹ Another example is God's view of stumbling others. Jesus said: "Whoever stumbles one of these little ones who have faith, it would be better for him if a millstone that is turned by a donkey were put around his neck and he were pitched into the sea." (Mark 9:42) Those words express strong feelings! Since Jesus perfectly reflected his Father's personality, we can be sure that Jehovah feels just as strongly about anyone whose callous actions stumble one of Jesus' followers.—John 14:9.

¹⁰ Do we share the view of Jehovah and Jesus? Have we made it our own? What do our actions reveal? For instance, suppose we are attracted to a certain style of dress or grooming that is likely to upset some in the congregation or that may well arouse passion in the minds of others. Will our loving concern for fellow believers override our personal preferences in style?—1 Tim. 2:9, 10.

¹¹ A third example: Jehovah hates unrighteousness. (Isa. 61:8) While he knows that we have some wrong inclinations because of inherited imperfection, he exhorts us to cultivate similar hatred for unrighteousness. (**Read Psalm 97:10.**) Meditating on why Jehovah detests badness will help us make his view our

own, giving us added strength to resist wrongdoing.

¹² Cultivating Jehovah's view of unrighteousness will also help us identify certain practices as wrong, even though they are not specifically mentioned in God's Word. For example, lap dancing is a form of lewd conduct that is becoming more common in the world. Some might excuse such conduct, reasoning that it is not the same as outright sexual relations.* But do such actions reflect the thinking of God, who abhors every kind of badness? Let us stay far from wrongdoing by cultivating self-control as well as an abhorrence for what Jehovah hates.—Rom. 12:9.

GIVING ADVANCE THOUGHT TO FUTURE DECISIONS

¹³ When studying, we do well to consider what bearing Jehovah's thoughts may have on situations we might face in the future. That way, should we be in a situation requiring an immediate decision, we will not be caught completely off guard. (Prov. 22:3) Consider some Bible examples.

¹⁴ By immediately rejecting the attempted seductions of Potiphar's wife, Joseph showed that he had given thought to Jehovah's view of marital

* Lap dancing is defined as "an activity in which a usually seminude performer sits and gyrates on the lap of a customer." Depending on the facts of an actual situation, this could constitute sexual immorality requiring judicial action. A Christian who has taken part in such activity should seek help from the elders.—Jas. 5:14, 15.

9, 10. How might we show that we share Jehovah's view of stumbling others?

11, 12. How will cultivating God's view of badness combined with self-control protect us from wrongdoing?

13. Why should we give advance thought to how Jehovah's viewpoints may affect our future decisions?

14. What do we learn from Joseph's refusal of Potiphar's wife?



Did you do research, complete a legal medical document, and speak with your doctor?
(See paragraph 16)

faithfulness. **(Read Genesis 39:8, 9.)** Furthermore, his reply to Potiphar's wife: "How could I commit this great badness and actually sin against God?" indicates that he had made God's view his own. What about us? Suppose a coworker began manifesting flirtatious behavior. Or what if a sexually explicit message or image was sent to your mobile phone?* It is far easier to take a stand if we have already sought out and adopted Jehovah's view on such matters and have determined in advance what we will do.

¹⁵ Consider now the example of the three Hebrews known as Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego. Their resolute refusal to worship the image of gold erected by King Nebuchadnezzar and their

* Sending sexually explicit messages, photos, or videos via mobile phone is called sexting. Depending on the particulars, it may warrant judicial action. In some cases, minors who were involved with sexting have been prosecuted as sex offenders. For more information, go to the jw.org website and read the online article "Young People Ask—What Should I Know About Sexting?" (Look under BIBLE TEACHINGS > TEENAGERS.) Or see the article "How to Talk to Your Teen About Sexting" in the *Awake!* issue of November 2013, pp. 4-5.

15. How can we, like the three Hebrews, resist pressure to compromise our loyalty to Jehovah?

pointed reply to the king showed that they had given thought to what was involved in remaining faithful to Jehovah. (Ex. 20:4, 5; Dan. 3:4-6, 12, 16-18) Suppose your employer asked you to contribute funds for an upcoming celebration connected with false religion. What would you do? Rather than wait for these situations to arise, why not give thought *now* to Jehovah's thinking on such matters? Then, should any of these situations occur, you will find it easier to do and say the right thing, as the three Hebrews did.

¹⁶ Giving advance thought to the need to remain loyal can also prove helpful in the event of a medical emergency. While we are firmly resolved to avoid the transfusion of whole blood or any of its four major components, some procedures involving blood require making a personal decision based on Bible principles that indicate Jehovah's thinking. (Acts 15:28, 29) Surely the best time to weigh such matters is not in a hospital, possibly when we are in pain and under pressure to make a quick decision. Now

16. How can a clear grasp of Jehovah's thinking help us to prepare for a medical emergency?

would be the time to do research, complete a legal medical document indicating your wishes, and speak with your doctor.*

¹⁷ Finally, consider Jesus' quick response to Peter's misguided advice: "Be kind to yourself, Lord." Jesus had apparently given much prior thought to God's will for him and to the Scriptures that applied to his life and death on earth. This knowledge strengthened his decision to maintain his faithful, self-sacrificing course without wavering.—**Read Matthew 16:21-23.**

¹⁸ Today, God's will for his people is to develop a friendship with him and have as full a share as possible in his work. (Matt. 6:33; 28:19, 20; Jas. 4:8) As in the case of Jesus, well-meaning people might try to sway us from that course. For example, what if your employer offered you a promotion with a substantial increase in salary but the position would interfere with your spiritual activities? Or if you are in school, suppose you were offered an opportunity to move away from home to receive additional education. At that moment, would you need to do prayerful research, consult with your family and perhaps with the elders, and then make a decision? Why not learn Jehovah's thinking on such matters *now* and endeavor to make his thoughts your own? Then, if you are ever presented with such an offer, you may find that it hardly amounts to a temptation. Your spiri-

* Pertinent Bible principles have been discussed in our publications. See, for example, the book *How to Remain in God's Love*, pp. 246-249.

17-19. Why is it important to learn Jehovah's thinking on matters *now*? Give an example of a situation for which we need to be prepared.

tual goals are set, your heart is resolved, and all that remains for you is to carry out a decision that you have already made.

¹⁹ You can probably think of other situations that could arise suddenly, unexpectedly. Of course, we cannot prepare for every conceivable possibility. But if we meditate on Jehovah's thinking during personal study, we will be more likely to recall what we have studied and be able to apply it to the specific situation at hand. Let us, then, be mindful of the need to note Jehovah's thinking on matters, make it our own, and consider how having God's view will affect our present and future actions.

JEHOVAH'S THOUGHTS AND YOUR FUTURE

²⁰ We keenly anticipate the new world. Most of us are looking forward to life without end on a paradise earth. Under Kingdom rule, mankind will be set free from the sorrows that characterize this system of things. Of course, even then, people will continue to exercise free will. Each person will make choices according to his or her preferences and desires.

²¹ Of course, such freedom will not be absolute. In matters of right and wrong, meek ones will be guided by Jehovah's laws and his thinking. This will be delightful, resulting in the greatest joy and abundance of peace. (Ps. 37:11) Meanwhile, we can have a measure of that joy now as we make Jehovah's thoughts our own.

20, 21. (a) Why will we enjoy relative freedom in the new world? (b) How can we obtain a measure of that joy now?

KINDNESS

A Quality Expressed in Word and Action

LOVE
JOY
PEACE
PATIENCE
KINDNESS
GOODNESS
FAITH
MILDNESS
SELF-CONTROL

HOW reassuring and comforting an act of kindness can be! When we realize that someone cares for us, we are grateful. Since each of us appreciates being treated with kindness, how can we develop this beautiful quality?

Kindness involves taking a genuine interest in the welfare of others—an interest that is expressed through helpful words and deeds. An active quality, kindness is more than a veneer of politeness and courtesy. True kindness is motivated by deep love and empathy. More than that, such kindness is part of the fruitage of God’s holy spirit that Christians are told to cultivate. (Gal. 5:22, 23) We must develop kindness, so let us examine how Jehovah and his Son have shown this quality and how we can follow their example.

JEHOVAH IS KIND TOWARD ALL

Jehovah is kind and considerate toward all, including “the unthankful and wicked.” (Luke 6:35) For instance, Jehovah “makes his sun rise on both the wicked and the good and makes it rain on both the righteous and the unrighteous.” (Matt. 5:45) Hence, even those who do not acknowledge Jehovah as their Creator still benefit from his kind provisions for life and may enjoy a measure of happiness.

We find an outstanding example of kindness in what Jehovah did for Adam and

Eve. Shortly after they sinned, Adam and Eve “sewed fig leaves together and made loin coverings for themselves.” However, Jehovah knew that they would need suitable clothing in order to live outside of Eden, where the ground was now cursed with “thorns and thistles.” So Jehovah kindly responded to their need by making “long garments from skins” for them. —Gen. 3:7, 17, 18, 21.

Although Jehovah is kind to “both the wicked and the good,” he especially desires to show kindness toward his faithful servants. As an example, during the days of the prophet Zechariah, an angel was troubled at seeing the reconstruction of the temple in Jerusalem come to a standstill. Jehovah listened to the angel’s concerns and replied with “kind and comforting words.” (Zech. 1:12, 13) Jehovah dealt similarly with the prophet Elijah. At one point, the prophet felt so low that he asked Jehovah to put him to death. Jehovah was attentive to Elijah’s feelings and sent an angel to strengthen him. Moreover, God assured the prophet that he was not alone. After Elijah received such kind words and the help he needed, he was able to carry on in his assignment. (1 Ki. 19:1-18) Among God’s servants, who has been foremost in reflecting Jehovah’s outstanding quality of kindness?

JESUS—A MAN OF GREAT KINDNESS

During his earthly ministry, Jesus was known for being kind and considerate. He was never harsh or overbearing. With empathy he said: “Come to me, all you who are toiling and loaded down, and I will refresh you. . . . For my yoke is kindly.” (Matt. 11:28-30) In response to his kindness, people followed Jesus wherever he went. “Moved with pity,” Jesus fed them, healed their sick and infirm, and taught them “many things” about his Father.—Mark 6:34; Matt. 14:14; 15:32-38.

As evidence of his great kindness, Jesus was understanding and discerning in his dealings with others. In fact, no matter how inconvenient the request, Jesus received “kindly” all those who sincerely sought him out. (Luke 9:10, 11) For instance, he did not reprimand a frightened woman who, although she was ceremonially unclean, touched his outer garment in hopes of being cured of a flow of blood. (Lev. 15:25-28) With compassion for this woman who had suffered for 12 years, Jesus told her: “Daughter, your faith has made you well. Go in peace, and be healed from your grievous sickness.” (Mark 5:25-34) What a marvelous act of kindness!

KINDNESS REQUIRES POSITIVE ACTION

In the examples noted above, we see that true kindness is expressed by action. Jesus illustrated the need for action in the parable about the neighborly Samaritan. Although animosity existed between Samaritans and Jews, the Samaritan man in the parable felt pity for a man who had been robbed, beaten, and left half-dead on the road. Kindness moved the Samari-

tan to action. He treated the man’s wounds and took him to an inn. The Samaritan then paid the innkeeper to care for the injured man and even offered to pay for any additional expenses.—Luke 10:29-37.

While kindness is often expressed by deeds, it can also be shown through thoughtful and motivating words. Hence, though “anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down,” the Bible adds that “a good word cheers it up.” (Prov. 12:25) We can lift the spirits of others when we are motivated by kindness and goodness to share upbuilding things with them.* Our kind words will show that we care about them. Thus encouraged, they will cope better with the trials they face in life.—Prov. 16:24.

CULTIVATING KINDNESS

Because of being created “in God’s image,” all humans are capable of developing the quality of kindness. (Gen. 1:27) For instance, Julius, a Roman army officer in whose custody the apostle Paul traveled to Rome, treated the apostle “with kindness and permitted him to go to his friends and enjoy their care” at the city of Sidon. (Acts 27:3) Sometime later, the inhabitants of Malta showed “extraordinary kindness” to Paul and others who had just experienced shipwreck. The islanders even made a fire to warm the victims. (Acts 28:1, 2) Yet, as commendable as their actions were, kindness involves more than just performing an occasional kind act.

To please God fully, we must develop kindness as a permanent part of our personality and way of life. For this reason, Jehovah tells us to “clothe” ourselves with kindness. (Col. 3:12) Admittedly, though,

* Goodness will be considered in a future article in this nine-part series on the fruitage of God’s holy spirit.

we do not always find it easy to make this godly quality a part of us. Why not? We may hold back from showing kindness because of shyness, insecurity, opposition, or lingering traces of selfishness. Nevertheless, we can overcome such difficulties by relying on holy spirit and by imitating Jehovah's pattern of kindness.—1 Cor. 2:12.

Can we identify areas wherein we need to improve in showing kindness? We should ask ourselves: 'Am I an empathetic listener? Am I alert to the needs of others? When was the last time I was kind to someone who is not a family member or a close friend?' Then we can set goals, such as getting to know more about the people around us, especially in the Christian congregation. In this way we can become alert to their circumstances and their needs. Next, we should try to show kindness to others in ways that we would appreciate receiving it if we were in their place. (Matt. 7:12) Finally, Jehovah will bless our efforts to cultivate kindness if we ask him for help.—Luke 11:13.

KINDNESS ATTRACTS OTHERS

When the apostle Paul listed what distinguished him as God's minister, he included "kindness." (2 Cor. 6:3-6) People were drawn to Paul because of his personal interest in them, which he expressed through kind actions and words. (Acts 28:30, 31) Similarly, we can attract people to the truth by our kind behavior. When we show kindness to all, including those who oppose us, we may warm their heart and melt away their hostility. (Rom. 12:20) In time, they may even be attracted to the Bible's message.

In the earthly Paradise to come, countless resurrected ones will no doubt be thrilled to experience true kindness, per-

haps for the first time. Out of gratitude, they in turn will be moved to show kindness to others. Anyone then living who refuses to show kindness and help others will have no permanent place under God's Kingdom. On the other hand, those approved by God to live forever will treat one another in a loving and kind way. (Ps. 37:9-11) What a secure and peaceful world that will be! However, before that blessed time arrives, how can we benefit now from showing kindness?

BENEFITS FROM SHOWING KINDNESS

"A kind man benefits himself," the Bible says. (Prov. 11:17) People are drawn to a kind person, and they tend to be kind to him as well. Jesus said: "With the measure that you are measuring out, they will measure out to you in return." (Luke 6:38) Thus, a kind person easily finds and keeps good friends.

The apostle Paul urged those in the congregation in Ephesus to "become kind to one another, tenderly compassionate, freely forgiving one another." (Eph. 4:32) A congregation benefits greatly when it is made up of empathetic Christians who show kindness and seek to help one another. Such ones never resort to harsh words, sharp criticism, or hurtful sarcasm. Instead of spreading harmful gossip, they strive to use their tongue to help others. (Prov. 12:18) As a result, the congregation thrives spiritually.

Yes, kindness is a quality expressed by word and action. When we are kind, we reflect the warm and generous personality of our God, Jehovah. (Eph. 5:1) In turn, we strengthen our congregations and draw others to pure worship. May we always be known as a people who display kindness!

Who were the Benefactors of whom Jesus spoke on the evening before his death, and why were they given that title?

■ On the evening before his death, Jesus counseled his apostles not to seek a position of prominence among their fellow believers. He told them: “The kings of the nations lord it over them, and those having authority over them are called Benefactors. You, though, are not to be that way.”—Luke 22:25, 26.

Who were the Benefactors to whom Jesus referred? Inscriptions, coins, and writings reveal that it was a custom in Greek and Roman societies to honor eminent men and rulers with the title of *Euergetes*, or Benefactor. This honor was given because such men had rendered some valuable public service.

A number of kings bore the title Benefactor. Among these were the Egyptian rulers known as Ptolemy III Euergetes (c. 247-222 B.C.E.) and Ptolemy VIII Euergetes II (c. 147-117 B.C.E.). Roman rulers Julius Caesar (48-44 B.C.E.) and Augustus (31 B.C.E.–14 C.E.) also bore the title, as did Herod the Great, king of Judea. In Herod’s case, the honor was probably earned when he imported wheat to relieve a famine among his people and provided clothes for the needy.

According to German Bible scholar Adolf Deissmann, the use of the title Benefactor was widespread. He noted: “It would not be difficult to collect from inscriptions, with very little loss of time, over a hundred instances [of the use of this title].”

So, then, what did Jesus mean when he told his disciples: “You, though, are not to be that way”? Was Jesus telling them not to be public-spirited, that is, not to be concerned about the general welfare of people around them? Not at all. What seems to have concerned Jesus was the motivation behind acts of generosity.

In Jesus’ day, wealthy individuals aimed to gain a good reputation for themselves by sponsoring spectacles and games in the arena, building parks and temples, and supporting similar activities. However, they did so with the objective of winning plaudits, popularity, or votes. “Although there are examples of real generosity from such donors,” says one reference work, “the practice was often inspired by political self-interest.” Such a spirit of ambition and self-interest is what Jesus urged his followers to avoid.

Some years later, the apostle Paul emphasized the same important truth about having the right motive in giving. He wrote to his fellow believers in Corinth: “Let each one do just as he has resolved in his heart, not grudgingly or under compulsion, for God loves a cheerful giver.”—2 Cor. 9:7.



WHAT GIFT CAN WE GIVE TO JEHOVAH?

JESUS once said: “There is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving.” (Acts 20:35) That basic truth applies to our relationship with Jehovah. Why so? Jehovah has given us many gifts that make us happy, but we can derive even *greater* happiness by *giving* a gift to Jehovah. What gift can we give to Jehovah? Proverbs 3:9 says:

“Honor Jehovah with your valuable things.” Our “valuable things” include our time, our talents, our strength, and our material assets. When we use such resources to advance true worship, we are giving Jehovah a gift, and doing so brings us great happiness.

When it comes to our material resources, what will help us

not to overlook giving our gift to Jehovah? The apostle Paul told the Corinthians to “set something aside” as a contribution. (1 Cor. 16:2) What can you do if you want to get more information about the methods of donation that are available in your area? Please see the box below.



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