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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

Should the Clergy Preach Politics?

THE WATCHTOWER®
ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM

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

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Should THE CLERGY Preach Politics?

"INVOLVEMENT in politics can help the poor, a Canadian archbishop told pilgrims . . . Even if the political system does not seem to be according to God's will, 'we need to get involved so that we can bring justice to the poor.' "—*Catholic News.*

Reports of senior churchmen speaking out in favor of involvement in politics are not unusual; neither are religious leaders who hold political office a rarity. Some have tried to clean up politics. Others are admired and remembered for their campaigns on such issues as racial equality and the abolition of slavery.

Nevertheless, many laymen feel uneasy when their preachers take sides on political issues. "It was evangelical churchgoers who sometimes questioned the public activism of their clergy," said a *Christian Century* article on political theology. Many religious people feel that the church is just too sacred a place for politics.

This raises some interesting questions that are of concern to all who wish to see a better world. Can preachers of Christianity clean up politics?* Is preaching politics God's way of achieving better government and a better world? Did Christianity start out as a new way to practice politics?

How Politics in Christ's Name Began

In *The Early Church,* historian Henry Chadwick says that the early Christian congregation was known for its "indifference to the possession of power in this world." It was a "non-political, quietist, and pacifist community." *A History of Christianity* says: "There was a conviction widely held among Christians that none of their number should hold office under the state . . . As late as the beginning of the third century Hippolytus said that historic Christian custom required a civic magistrate to resign his office as a condition of joining the Church." Gradually, though, men coveting power began taking the lead in many congregations, giving themselves high-sounding titles. (Acts 20:29, 30) Some wanted to be both religious leaders and politicians. A sudden change in Rome's government gave such churchmen the opportunity they wanted.

In the year 312 C.E., the pagan Roman Emperor Constantine turned a friendly eye

* Politics has been defined as "the activities associated with the governance of a country or area, especially the debate or conflict between individuals or parties having or hoping to achieve power."—*The New Oxford Dictionary of English.*

Church leaders compromised with rulers, such as Emperor Constantine, to receive political power

Musée du Louvre, Paris

toward nominal Christianity. Astonishingly, the church bishops were content to compromise with the pagan emperor in exchange for the privileges he conferred on them. "The Church became more and more implicated in high political decisions," wrote Henry Chadwick. What effect did involvement in politics have on churchmen?

How Politics Affected Preachers

The idea that God would use churchmen as politicians was promoted especially by Augustine, an influential fifth-century Catholic theologian. He envisioned the church ruling over the nations and bringing peace to mankind. But historian H. G. Wells wrote: "The history of Europe from the fifth century onward to the fifteenth is very largely the history of the failure of this great idea of a divine world government to realize itself in practice." Christendom did not bring peace even to Europe, much less to the world. What had been thought of as being Christianity lost its standing in the eyes of many. What went wrong?

Many who claimed to preach Christianity were drawn into politics with good intentions, but then they found themselves participating in evil. Martin Luther, a preacher and a translator of the Bible, is famous for his efforts to reform the Catholic Church. However, his bold stand against church doctrines made him popular with those who had political motives for rebellion. Luther lost the respect of many when he too began to speak out on political issues. Initially he favored the peasants who were rebelling against oppressive nobles. Then, when the rebellion turned savage, he encouraged the nobles to crush the rebellion, which they did, butchering thousands. Not surprisingly, the peasants considered him a traitor. Luther also encouraged the nobles in their own rebellion against the Catholic emperor. In fact, Protestants, as Luther's followers came to be known, formed a political movement from the beginning. How did power affect Luther? It corrupted him. For example, although he at first opposed coercing religious dissidents, he later encouraged his political friends to execute by burning those who opposed infant baptism.

John Calvin was a famous clergyman in Geneva, but he came to have enormous political influence as well. When Michael Servetus demonstrated that the Trinity has no basis in Scripture, Calvin used his political influence to support the execution of Servetus, who was burned at the stake. What a horrific departure from Jesus' teachings!

Perhaps these men forgot what the Bible says at 1 John 5:19: "The whole world is lying in the power of the wicked one." Did they have a sincere desire to clean up the politics of their day, or was it the prospect of power and of having friends in high places that attracted them? In any case, they should have remembered the inspired words of Jesus' disciple James: "Do you not know that the friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever, therefore, wants to be a friend of the world is constituting himself an enemy of God." (James 4:4) James knew that Jesus had said of his follow-

Augustine

Luther

Calvin

Why were well-known religious leaders drawn to politics?

Augustine: ICCD Photo; Calvin: Portrait by Holbein, from the book *The History of Protestantism* (Vol. II)

Does NEUTRALITY Hinder Christian Love?

BEING a Christian embraces more than reading the Bible, praying, and singing hymns on Sundays. It involves doing things both for God and for people. The Bible says: "Let us love, neither in word nor with the tongue, but in deed and truth." (1 John 3:18) Jesus had sincere concern for others, and Christians want to imitate him. The apostle Paul urged fellow believers always to have "plenty to do in the work of the Lord." (1 Corinthians 15:58) But what is the work of the Lord? Does it include trying to change government policy for the benefit of the poor and the oppressed? Is that what Jesus did?

Although Jesus was urged to intervene in political matters or take sides, he refused to do so. He turned down Satan's offer of ers: "They are no part of the world, just as I am no part of the world."—John 17:14.

Even so, while recognizing that Christians should be no part of the world's badness, many object to being politically neutral, truly "no part of the world." They claim that such neutrality prevents Christians from actively showing love for others. They believe that church leaders should speak out and play a role in combating corruption and injustice. But is the neutrality that Jesus taught really incompatible with active concern for others? Can a Christian keep separate from divisive political issues and at the same time provide practical help for others? The following article analyzes these questions.

The neutrality of Christian ministers does not prevent them from helping others

power over all the kingdoms of the world, he refused to be drawn into an argument over the paying of taxes, and he withdrew when a popular movement wanted to make him king. (Matthew 4:8-10; 22:17-21; John 6:15) But his neutrality did not prevent him from working for the benefit of others.

Jesus concentrated on what would bring lasting good to others. While his feeding the five thousand and curing the sick brought temporary relief for a few, his teaching made everlasting blessings available to all mankind. Jesus became known, not as an organizer of relief campaigns, but simply as "the Teacher." (Matthew 26:18; Mark 5:35; John 11:28) He said: "For this I have been born, and for this I have come into the world, that I should bear witness to the truth."—John 18:37.

Preaching Something Better Than Politics

The truth Jesus taught was not political theory. Rather, it centered on the Kingdom of which he himself would be King. (Luke 4:43) This Kingdom is a heavenly government, and it will replace all human administrations and bring permanent peace to mankind. (Isaiah 9:6, 7; 11:9; Daniel 2:44) It is, therefore, the *only true* hope for mankind. Is it not more loving to declare such a sure hope for the future than to encourage people to trust in men to provide a secure future? The Bible says: "Do not put your trust in nobles, nor in the son of earthling man, to whom no salvation belongs. His spirit goes out, he goes back to his ground; in that day his thoughts do perish. Happy is the one who has the God of Jacob for his help, whose hope is in Jehovah his God." (Psalm 146:3-5) So rather than sending his disciples out to preach a better way of organizing governments, Jesus taught them to preach the "good news of the kingdom."—Matthew 10:6, 7; 24:14.

This, then, is "the work of the Lord" that Christian preachers are commissioned to do. Because subjects of God's Kingdom are required to love one another, the Kingdom will succeed in eliminating poverty by distributing mankind's resources in a balanced way. (Psalm 72:8, 12, 13) This is good news and is certainly worth preaching.

Today, Jehovah's Witnesses are organized for this "work of the Lord" in 235 lands. In harmony with Jesus' command, they are respectful toward all governments. (Matthew 22:21) But they also observe these words to his followers: "You are no part of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world." —John 15:19.

Some who used to preach politics have changed after making a careful study of the Bible. An Italian politician who was a member of Catholic Action, a church-controlled organization, said: "I went on to politics, feeling that a person should contribute actively to the political and social development of society." After resigning as city mayor in order to preach God's Kingdom as one

of Jehovah's Witnesses, he explained why the efforts of sincere people in politics fail. "The world is what it is, not because decent people have not tried to better social conditions, but, rather, because the sincere efforts of the few have been overcome by the wickedness of the many."

Staying out of politics in order to preach the only true hope for mankind does not prevent true Christians from helping others in practical ways. Those whom they help to become subjects of God's Kingdom learn to change destructive attitudes, to respect authority, to improve their family life, and to have a balanced view of material wealth. Even more important, Jehovah's Witnesses help people to enjoy an intimate relationship with God.

Preachers of God's Kingdom benefit the society in which they live. But more than that, they direct people to put confidence in a government that is real and that will bring permanent peace to all who love God. As a result of their neutrality, these Christians are free to provide the most enduring and practical help available today.

From Politics to Preaching God's Kingdom

As a boy, Átila learned liberation theology from his parish priests in Belém, Brazil. He enjoyed hearing of mankind's being eventually freed from oppression and joined an activist community, where he learned to organize protest marches and civil disobedience campaigns.

But Átila also enjoyed teaching the group's children, using a book he had been given, *Listening to the Great Teacher.** It talked of good conduct and of obedience to authorities. This made Átila wonder why those who support liberation theology do not follow Jesus' high moral standards and why some forget oppressed people when they gain power.

He withdrew from the community. Later, Jehovah's Witnesses knocked on his door and talked to him about God's Kingdom. He was soon studying the Bible and learning about the true remedy for mankind's oppression.

About that time, Átila attended a Catholic seminar on faith and politics. "These are two sides of the same coin," explained the instructors. He also attended a meeting at the Kingdom Hall. What a difference! For one thing, there was no smoking, drinking, or obscene jokes. He made up his mind to join them in their preaching work, and soon he was baptized. Now he can see why liberation theology is not the real solution to the problems of the poor.

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

BE COURAGEOUS LIKE JEREMIAH

"Hope in Jehovah; be courageous and let your heart be strong. Yes, hope in Jehovah."—PSALM 27:14.

JEHOVAH'S WITNESSES dwell in a spiritual paradise. (Isaiah 11:6-9) In the midst of this very troubled world, they share a unique spiritual environment with fellow Christians, who are at peace with Jehovah God and with one another. (Psalm 29:11; Isaiah 54:13) And their spiritual paradise is growing. All who 'do the will of God wholesouled' contribute to extending it. (Ephesians 6:6) How? By living according to Bible principles and by teaching others to do the same, thus inviting them to share the rich blessings of that paradise.—Matthew 28:19, 20; John 15:8.

2 However, our living in a spiritual paradise does not mean that we do not have to endure trials. We are still imperfect and suffer the pangs of sickness, old age, and eventual death. Moreover, we are witnessing the fulfillment of the prophecies dealing with "the last days." (2 Timothy 3:1) Wars, crime, sickness, famine, and other severe hardships afflict all mankind, and Jehovah's Witnesses are not exempt.—Mark 13:3-10; Luke 21:10, 11.

3 Besides all of that, we are well aware that outside the warm environment of our spiritual paradise, cold winds of opposition blow. Jesus warned his followers: "Because you are no part of the world, but I have chosen you out of the world, on this account the world hates you. Bear in mind the word I said to you, A slave is not greater than his master. If they have persecuted me, they will persecute you also." (John 15:18-21) Things are no different today. Most people still do not understand or appreciate our form of worship. Some criticize, ridicule, or even—as Jesus warned—hate us. (Matthew 10:22) Often, we are the target of misinformation and malicious propaganda through the media. (Psalm 109:1-3) Yes, we all face challenging circumstances, and some of us may start to lose heart. How can we endure?

4 Jehovah will help us. Under inspiration, the psalmist wrote: "Many are the calamities of the righteous one, but out of them all Jehovah delivers him." (Psalm 34:19; 1 Corinthians 10:13) Many of us can attest that when we put our full confidence in Jehovah, he gives us the strength to endure any hardship. Our love for him and the joy that is set before us help us to fight discouragement and fear. (Hebrews 12:2) Thus, in the face of difficulties, we continue to stand firm.

God's Word Strengthened Jeremiah

5 Throughout history, faithful servants of Jehovah have found joy despite difficult circumstances. Some lived during times of judgment when Jehovah executed his wrath on the unfaithful. Among such faithful wor-

1. What rich blessing do Jehovah's Witnesses enjoy?
2, 3. What do true Christians have to endure?
4. Where do we look for help to endure?
5, 6. (a) What examples do we have of true worshipers who were able to endure? (b) How did Jeremiah react when called to be a prophet?

Jeremiah thought that he was too young and inexperienced to be a prophet

shipers were Jeremiah and a few of his contemporaries, as well as first-century Christians. Those historical examples are recorded in the Bible for our encouragement, and we can learn much from studying them. (Romans 15:4) For example, consider Jeremiah.

6 At a young age, Jeremiah was called to serve as a prophet in Judah. This was not an easy assignment. Many were worshiping false gods. Although Josiah, who was king when Jeremiah started his ministry, was faithful, all succeeding kings were unfaithful, and most of those responsible to instruct the people—the prophets and the priests—were not on the side of truth. (Jeremiah 1:1, 2; 6:13; 23:11) How, then, did Jeremiah feel when Jehovah called him to be a prophet? Fearful! (Jeremiah 1:8, 17) Jeremiah recalled his initial reaction: "I said: 'Alas, O Sovereign Lord Jehovah! Here I actually do not know how to speak, for I am but a boy.' "—Jeremiah 1:6.

7 Jeremiah's territory was largely unresponsive, and he often met with strong opposition. On one occasion Pashhur, a priest, struck him and had him put in the stocks. Jeremiah reported how he felt at the time: "I said: 'I am not going to make mention of him [Jehovah], and I shall speak no more in his name.' " Perhaps you at times have felt the same way—wanting to give up. Notice what helped Jeremiah to persevere. He said: "In my heart it [God's word, or message] proved to be like a burning fire shut up in my bones; and I got tired of holding in, and I was unable to endure it." (Jeremiah 20:9) Do God's words have that effect on you?

7. What reaction did Jeremiah meet in his territory, and how did he respond?

Jeremiah's Companions

8 Jeremiah was not alone in his prophetic work. He had companions, and that must have encouraged him. Sometimes, though, his companions did not act wisely. For example, a fellow prophet named Urijah was busy delivering warnings against Jerusalem and Judah "in accord with all the words of Jeremiah." However, when King Jehoiakim ordered that Urijah be put to death, the prophet fled in fear to Egypt. That did not save him. The king's men pursued him, captured him, and brought him back to Jerusalem, where he was killed. What a shock that must have been for Jeremiah!—Jeremiah 26:20-23.

9 Another companion of Jeremiah was his secretary, Baruch. Baruch was a fine support for Jeremiah, but on one occasion he too lost spiritual focus. He began complaining, saying: "Woe, now, to me, for Jehovah has added grief to my pain! I have grown weary because of my sighing, and no resting-place

8, 9. (a) What weakness did the prophet Urijah display, with what result? (b) Why was Baruch discouraged, and how was he helped?

Even when being persecuted, Jeremiah knew that Jehovah was with him "like a terrible mighty one"

have I found." Baruch, discouraged, began to lose appreciation for spiritual things. Still, Jehovah kindly gave Baruch wise counsel, and he was readjusted. He was then assured that he would survive Jerusalem's destruction. (Jeremiah 45:1-5) How encouraged Jeremiah must have been when Baruch regained his spiritual balance!

Jehovah Supported His Prophet

10 Most important, Jehovah did not abandon Jeremiah. He understood how his prophet felt and gave him the strength and support he needed. For example, at the beginning of Jeremiah's ministry when he expressed doubts about his qualifications, Jehovah told him: "Do not be afraid because of their faces, for 'I am with you to deliver you' is the utterance of Jehovah." Then, after giving his prophet information about his assignment, Jehovah said: "They will be certain to fight against you, but they will not prevail against you, for 'I am with you,' is the utterance of Jehovah, 'to deliver you.' " (Jeremiah 1:8, 19) How comforting! And Jehovah proved true to his word.

11 Thus, after being confined in the stocks and exposed to public mockery, Jeremiah confidently said: "Jehovah was with me like a terrible mighty one. That is why the very ones persecuting me will stumble and not prevail. They will certainly be put to much shame." (Jeremiah 20:11) In later years when attempts were made to kill Jeremiah, Jehovah continued with him, and like

10. What promises of support did Jehovah make to Jeremiah?

11. How do we know that Jehovah fulfilled his promise to support Jeremiah?

Baruch, Jeremiah survived the destruction of Jerusalem as a free man, whereas his persecutors and those who ignored his warnings either perished or were dragged off to Babylon.

12 Like Jeremiah, today many of Jehovah's Witnesses endure afflictions. As mentioned earlier, some of these are caused by our own imperfections, others by the disarray in which the world finds itself, and still others by those who oppose our work. Such afflictions can be discouraging. Like Jeremiah, we may come to the point of wondering whether we can carry on. Indeed, we can expect to be discouraged from time to time. Discouragement tests the depth of our love of Jehovah. So let us be determined not to let discouragement make us withdraw from Jehovah's service as Urijah did. Instead, let us imitate Jeremiah and be confident of Jehovah's support.

How to Fight Discouragement

13 Jeremiah was in regular communication with Jehovah God, telling him his deepest feelings and begging for strength. That is a fine example to follow. David of old, who looked to the same Source of strength, wrote: "To my sayings do give ear, O Jehovah; do understand my sighing. Do pay attention to the sound of my cry for help, O my King and my God, because to you I pray." (Psalm 5:1, 2) The inspired account of David's life shows that again and again Jehovah responded to David's prayers for help. (Psalm 18:1, 2; 21:1-5) In a similar way, when pressures are heavy or our problems seem insurmountable, it is most comforting to turn to Jehovah in prayer and open our hearts to him. (Philippians 4:6, 7; 1 Thessalonians 5: 16-18) Jehovah does not refuse to listen to us. Rather, he assures us that 'he cares for us.' (1 Peter 5:6, 7) However, it would not be reasonable to pray to Jehovah and then not listen to what he says, would it?

14 How does Jehovah speak to us? Consider Jeremiah again. Since Jeremiah was a prophet, Jehovah communicated directly with him. Jeremiah describes the effect of God's words on his heart: "Your words were found, and I proceeded to eat them; and your word becomes to me the exultation and the rejoicing of my heart; for your name has been called upon me, O Jehovah God of armies." (Jeremiah 15:16) Yes, Jeremiah delighted in the fact that God's name had been called upon him, and His words were precious to the prophet. Hence, like the apostle Paul, Jeremiah was eager to declare the message entrusted to him.—Romans 1:15, 16.

15 Jehovah does not communicate directly with anyone today. However, we do have God's words in the pages of the Bible. Hence, if we have a serious approach to our study of the Bible and meditate deeply on what we learn, God's words will become "the exultation and the rejoicing" of our heart too. And we can be thrilled that we carry Jehovah's name when we go to share those words with others. Let us never lose sight of the fact that no other people in the world today declares Jehovah's name. Only his Witnesses announce the good news of God's established Kingdom and teach meek ones to become disciples of Jesus Christ. (Matthew 28:19, 20) How blessed we are! In view of what Jehovah has lovingly entrusted to us, how can we keep silent?

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12. Despite reasons for discouragement, what should we bear in mind?

13. How can we follow the examples of Jeremiah and David?

14. What effect did Jehovah's words have on Jeremiah?

15. How can we implant Jehovah's words in our heart, and what considerations will make us determined not to keep silent?

Let Us Watch Our Associations

16 Jeremiah reports something else that helped him to be courageous. He said: "I have not sat down in the intimate group of those playing jokes and begun exulting. Because of your hand I have sat down all by myself, for it is with denunciation that you have filled me." (Jeremiah 15:17) Jeremiah would rather be alone than be corrupted by bad companions. We today view matters the same way. We never forget the apostle Paul's warning that "bad associations spoil useful habits," even useful habits that we have had for many years.—1 Corinthians 15:33.

17 Bad associations can allow the spirit of the world to pollute our thinking. (1 Corinthians 2:12; Ephesians 2:2; James 4:4) Let us, then, train our perceptive powers to identify harmful associations and shun them completely. (Hebrews 5:14) If Paul were alive on earth today, what do you think he would say to a Christian who watched immoral or violent movies or violent sports? How would he counsel a brother pursuing friendships with total strangers on the Internet? What would he think of a Christian who spent hour after hour playing video games or watching television but did not have good personal study habits?—2 Corinthians 6:14b; Ephesians 5: 3-5, 15, 16.

Continue in the Spiritual Paradise

18 We treasure our spiritual paradise. There is nothing that remotely resembles it in the world today. Even unbelievers comment on the love, consideration, and kindness that Christians have for one another. (Ephesians 4:31, 32) Still, now more than ever, we need to fight discouragement. Good association, prayer, and good study habits can help us to remain spiritually strong. They will strengthen us to face any trial with complete confidence in Jehovah. —2 Corinthians 4:7, 8.

19 Never should we allow those who hate our Bible message to intimidate us and make us compromise our faith. Like the enemies who persecuted Jeremiah, those who fight against us are fighting against God. They will not prevail. Jehovah, who is so much stronger than our opponents, tells us: "Hope in Jehovah; be courageous and let your heart be strong. Yes, hope in Jehovah." (Psalm 27: 14) With hope in Jehovah deeply rooted in our heart, may we be resolved not to give up in doing what is fine. May we be confident that, like Jeremiah and Baruch, we will reap if we do not tire out.—Galatians 6:9.

20 Fighting discouragement is a constant struggle for many Christians. Young people, though, face special challenges. But they also have great opportunities. The following article is addressed directly to the youths among us. It will also be of interest to parents and to all dedicated adults in the congregation who by word, by example, and by direct support are in a position to help younger ones in the congregation.

16, 17. What was Jeremiah's view of associations, and how can we imitate him?
18. What will help us to stay spiritually strong?
19, 20. (a) What will help us to endure? (b) To whom is the following article addressed, and to whom is it also of interest?

How Would You Answer?

- Why can we expect discouraging circumstances, and to whom should we look for help?
- How did Jeremiah conquer discouragement despite having a difficult assignment?
- What will make our hearts 'exult and rejoice' even in the midst of difficulties?

YOUTHS, ARE YOU BUILDING FOR THE FUTURE?

"I myself well know the thoughts that I am thinking toward you, . . . thoughts of peace, and not of calamity, to give you a future and a hope."—JEREMIAH 29:11.

MOST adults think of youth as a wonderful time of life. They remember the energy and enthusiasm they had when they were young. They look back fondly on a time when they had far fewer responsibilities, a time when they had a lot of fun and a whole lifetime of opportunities lay ahead of them.

2 Those of you who are young likely see things differently. You may have problems handling the emotional and physical changes of youth. At school, you may face strong peer pressure. You may have to put up a determined effort to resist drug abuse, alcohol, and immorality. Many of you also face the neutrality issue or other issues related to your faith. Yes, youth can be a difficult time. Still, it *is* a time of opportunity. The question is, How will you use those opportunities?

Enjoy Your Youth

3 Older people will tell you that youth does not last long, and they are right. In just a few years, your youth will be behind you. So enjoy it while you have it! That was the counsel of King Solomon, who wrote: "Rejoice, young man, in your youth, and let your heart do you good in the days of your young manhood, and walk in the ways of your heart and in the things seen by your eyes." However, Solomon warned youths: "Remove vexation from your heart, and ward off calamity from your flesh." Further, he said: "Youth and the prime of life are vanity."—Ecclesiastes 11: 9, 10.

4 Do you grasp what Solomon meant? To illustrate, think of a young person who receives a large gift, perhaps an inheritance. What will he do with it? He can spend it all on enjoying himself—much like the prodigal son of Jesus' parable. (Luke 15:11-23) But what will happen when the money runs out? Surely he will regret that he was so irresponsible! On the other hand, suppose he uses the gift to build for the future, perhaps investing most of it wisely. In the long run, when he is benefiting from his investment, do you think that he will regret not having spent all his money on having a good time in his youth? Of course not!

5 Think of your youthful years as a gift from God, which they are. How will you use them? You can waste all that energy and enthusiasm on self-indulgence, just going from one good time to another with no thought to the future. If you do that, though, in your case "youth and the prime of life" will indeed prove to be "vanity." How much better to take advantage of your youth to prepare for the future!

6 Solomon stated a principle that can help

1, 2. In what different ways can the years of youth be viewed?
3. What counsel and what warning did Solomon give to youths?
4, 5. Why is it wise for young people to prepare for the future? Illustrate.
6. (a) What counsel of Solomon provides guidance for youths? (b) What would Jehovah like to do for young people, and how can a young person benefit from this?

you to make the best of your youth. He said: "Remember, now, your Grand Creator in the days of your young manhood." (Ecclesiastes 12:1) That is the key to success—listen to Jehovah and do his will. Jehovah told the ancient Israelites what he wanted to do for them: "I myself well know the thoughts that I am thinking toward you, . . . thoughts of peace, and not of calamity, to give you a future and a hope." (Jeremiah 29:11) Jehovah would also like to give you "a future and a hope." If you remember him in your actions, thoughts, and decisions, that future and that hope will be good.—Revelation 7:16, 17; 21:3, 4.

"Draw Close to God"

7 James encouraged us to remember Jehovah when he urged us: "Draw close to God, and he will draw close to you." (James 4:8) Jehovah is the Creator, the heavenly Sovereign, worthy of all worship and praise. (Revelation 4:11) Yet, if we draw close to him, he will draw close to us. Does not such loving interest warm your heart?—Matthew 22:37.

8 We draw close to Jehovah in a number of ways. For example, the apostle Paul says: "Be persevering in prayer, remaining awake in it with thanksgiving." (Colossians 4:2) In other words, cultivate the habit of praying. Do not be satisfied with merely saying amen after your father or a fellow Christian in the congregation has represented you in prayer. Have you ever poured out your heart to Jehovah and told him what you think, what you fear, what challenges you face? Have you ever told him things that you would be embarrassed to discuss with any human? Honest, heartfelt prayers bring a sense of peace. (Philippians 4:6, 7) They help us to draw close to Jehovah and to sense that he is drawing close to us.

7, 8. How can a young person draw close to God?

9 We see another way to draw close to Jehovah in these inspired words: "Listen to counsel and accept discipline, in order that you may become wise in your future." (Proverbs 19:20) Yes, if you listen to Jehovah and obey him, you are building for the future. How can you demonstrate that you do listen to Jehovah? No doubt you regularly attend Christian meetings and listen to the program parts. Also, you "honor your father and your mother" by being present at the family Bible study. (Ephesians 6:1, 2; Hebrews 10:24, 25) That is fine. In addition, though, do you 'buy out the time' to prepare for the meetings, to read the Bible regularly, to do research? Do you try to apply what you read, so that you will walk as a 'wise person'? (Ephesians 5:15-17; Psalm 1:1-3) If you do that, you are drawing close to Jehovah.

10 In the opening words of the book of Proverbs, the inspired writer explains the purpose of that Bible book. It is, he says, "for one to know wisdom and discipline, to discern the sayings of understanding, to receive the discipline that gives insight, righteousness and judgment and uprightness, to give to the inexperienced ones shrewdness, to a young man knowledge and thinking ability." (Proverbs 1:1-4) Hence, as you read and apply the words of Proverbs—as well as the rest of the Bible—you will cultivate righteousness and uprightness, and Jehovah will be happy to have you draw close to him. (Psalm 15:1-5) The more you cultivate judgment, shrewdness, knowledge, and thinking ability, the better will be your decisions.

11 Is it unreasonable to expect a young person to act wisely in this way? No, for many young Christians do so. As a result, others respect them and 'do not look down on their youth.' (1 Timothy 4:12) Their parents are

9. How can a youth listen to Jehovah?
10, 11. What great benefits do young people receive when they listen to Jehovah?

Will you allow personal pursuits to absorb all your youthful energy and enthusiasm?

justly proud of them, and Jehovah says that they make his heart rejoice. (Proverbs 27:11) Even though they are young, they can be confident that these inspired words apply to them: "Watch the blameless one and keep the upright one in sight, for the future of that man will be peaceful."—Psalm 37:37.

Make Good Choices

12 Youth is a time for making choices, some of which have lasting consequences. Some choices you make now will affect you for many years to come. Wise choices contribute to a happy, successful life. Unwise choices can blemish a whole lifetime. Consider how that is true of two choices you have to make. First: Whom do you choose to associate with? Why is that important? Well, the inspired proverb says: "He that is walking with wise persons will become wise, but he that is having dealings with the stupid ones will fare badly." (Proverbs 13:20) In other words, eventually we get to be like those with whom we associate—either wise or stupid. Which would you rather be?

12. What is one of the important choices that young people make, and why does that choice have long-term consequences?

13 When you think of association, you likely think of being with people. That is correct, but more is involved. When you watch a television program, listen to music, read a novel, go to a movie, or use certain resources on the Internet, you are having association. If that association panders to violent and immoral inclinations or encourages drug abuse, drunkenness, or anything else contrary to Bible principles, you are keeping company with "the senseless one," who acts as if Jehovah did not exist.—Psalm 14:1.

14 Perhaps you feel that since you attend Christian meetings and are active with the congregation, you are strong enough to handle a violent movie or a music album with good tunes but questionable lyrics. Maybe you feel that there will be no bad results if you take a quick look at a pornographic Web

13, 14. (a) Besides direct contact with people, what does association include? (b) What mistake should young ones avoid?

site on the Internet. The apostle Paul tells you that you are wrong! He says: "Bad associations spoil useful habits." (1 Corinthians 15:33) Sadly, many promising young Christians have had their good habits spoiled by unwise associations. Be determined, then, to shun such associations. If you do so, you will follow Paul's counsel: "Quit being fashioned after this system of things, but be transformed by making your mind over, that you may prove to yourselves the good and acceptable and perfect will of God."—Romans 12:2.

15 Here is a second choice you face. A time will come when you will have to decide what you want to do when you finish school. If you live in a land with a shortage of employment opportunities, you might feel pressured to grasp the best available. If you live in a prosperous country, there might be many choices, some of them very tempting. With the best of motives, your teachers or your parents might urge you to pursue a career offering financial security, perhaps even wealth. However, training for that career might severely limit the time you can spend serving Jehovah.

16 Remember to consult the Bible before making a decision. The Bible encourages us to work for a living, showing that we are responsible for supporting ourselves. (2 Thessalonians 3:10-12) Still, other things are involved. We encourage you to read the following scriptures and think about how they can help a young person to be balanced in the matter of choosing a career: Proverbs 30: 8, 9; Ecclesiastes 7:11, 12; Matthew 6:33; 1 Corinthians 7:31; 1 Timothy 6:9, 10. After reading those verses, do you see Jehovah's view on the matter?

17 Secular employment should never become so important that it overshadows our service to Jehovah. If you can qualify for reasonable employment with a high school education, fine. If you need some additional training after high school, that is something to discuss with your parents. However, never lose sight of "the more important things" —the spiritual things. (Philippians 1:9, 10) Do not make the mistake that Baruch, Jeremiah's scribe, made. He lost appreciation for his privilege of service and went 'seeking great things for himself.' (Jeremiah 45:5) He forgot for a time that no 'great thing' in this world would bring him closer to Jehovah or help him to survive the destruction of Jerusalem. Something similar can be said of us today.

Appreciate Spiritual Things

18 Have you seen pictures in the media of children in famine-stricken countries? If you have, your heart surely went out to them. Does your heart go out in a similar way to people in your neighborhood? Why should it? Because most of them are also starving. They are suffering from the famine prophesied by Amos: " 'There are days coming,' is the utterance of the Sovereign Lord Jehovah, 'and I will send a famine into the land, a famine, not for bread, and a thirst, not for water, but for hearing the words of Jehovah.' "—Amos 8:11.

19 True, most of those suffering from this spiritual starvation are not "conscious of

15. What is a second choice that young people have to make, and what pressures are sometimes put on them in this regard?

16, 17. Explain how different scriptures can help a young person to get a balanced view of employment.

18, 19. (a) What are most of your neighbors suffering from, and how should you feel toward them? (b) Why do many not feel spiritually hungry?

Wise young Christians keep their spiritual vision clear

their spiritual need." (Matthew 5:3) Many do not feel spiritually hungry. Some might even feel that they are well fed. But if they do, it is because they are feeding on the worthless "wisdom of the world," which includes materialism, scientific speculation, opinions about morality, and other such things. Some feel that modern "wisdom" makes Bible teachings out-of-date. However, "the world through its wisdom did not get to know God." The wisdom of the world will not help you to draw close to God. It is nothing but "foolishness with God."—1 Corinthians 1:20, 21; 3:19.

20 When you look at those pictures of hungry children, do you ever want to be like them? Of course not! Yet, some youths in Christian families have shown a desire to be like the spiritually starving people around them. Likely, such young ones think that youths in the world are carefree, enjoying life. They forget that those youths are alienated from Jehovah. (Ephesians 4:17, 18) They forget, too, the bad effects of spiritual starvation. Some of these are unwanted teen pregnancies and the physical and emotional effects of immorality, smoking, drunkenness, and drug abuse. Spiritual starvation allows for a rebellious spirit, an underlying hopelessness, and a lack of direction in life.

21 Therefore, when you are at school among ones who are not fellow worshipers of Jehovah, do not be overwhelmed by their attitudes. (2 Corinthians 4:18) Some will speak disdainfully about spiritual things. In addition, the media will deliver subtle propaganda, implying that it is normal to commit immorality, to get drunk, or to use foul language. Fight that influence. Continue to associate regularly with people who are "holding faith and a good conscience." Always have "plenty to do in the work of the Lord." (1 Timothy 1:19; 1 Corinthians 15:58) Keep busy at the Kingdom Hall and in the field service. During your school years, share in the auxiliary pioneer service from time to time. Reinforce your spiritual view in this way, and you will not lose your balance. —2 Timothy 4:5.

20. Why is it not reasonable to want to imitate people who do not worship Jehovah?

21. How can we protect ourselves from adopting the wrong attitudes of those who do not worship Jehovah?

What Is Your Conclusion?

- What inspired counsel helps young people in their planning for the future?
- What are some ways in which a youth can "draw close to God"?
- What are some decisions a young person makes that will affect his future?

22 A spiritual view of things will likely lead you to make decisions that others will not understand. For example, one young Christian man was a gifted musician and an honor student in every subject at school. When he graduated, he joined his father in a window-cleaning business so that he could pursue his chosen vocation as a full-time evangelizer, or pioneer. His teachers never did understand the reasons for his decision, but if you have drawn close to Jehovah, we are sure that you do.

23 As you consider how to use the precious resources of your youth, 'safely treasure up for yourself a fine foundation for the future, in order that you may get a firm hold on the real life.' (1 Timothy 6:19) Be determined to 'remember your Grand Creator' in your youth—and all the rest of your life. That is the only way to build for a successful future, a future that will never end.

22, 23. (a) Why will a young Christian often make choices that others do not understand? (b) What are youths encouraged to do?

STRENGTHEN ONE ANOTHER

"These very ones have become a strengthening aid to me."—COLOSSIANS 4:11.

IT CAN be dangerous to be the friend of someone languishing in prison—even if your friend has been imprisoned unjustly. The prison officials may view you with suspicion, watching your every move to ensure that you commit no crime. Therefore, it calls for courage to keep in close touch with your friend and visit him in prison.

2 Yet, this is exactly what some friends of the apostle Paul did some 1,900 years ago.

1, 2. Despite the dangers, why did Paul's friends visit him in prison?

They did not hesitate to visit Paul in his prison bonds to give him needed comfort and encouragement and to strengthen him spiritually. Who were these loyal friends? And what can we learn from their courage, loyalty, and friendship?—Proverbs 17:17.

"A Strengthening Aid"

3 Let us go back to about the year 60 C.E. The apostle Paul is in prison in Rome on the fabricated charge of sedition. (Acts 24:5; 25: 11, 12) Paul singles out for mention five Christians who stood by his side: Tychicus, his personal envoy from the district of Asia and a "fellow slave in the Lord"; Onesimus, a "faithful and beloved brother" from Colossae; Aristarchus, a Macedonian from Thessalonica and at one time a "fellow captive" with Paul; Mark, the cousin of Paul's missionary companion Barnabas and the writer of the Gospel bearing his name; and Justus, one of the apostle's fellow workers "for the kingdom of God." Paul says of the five: "These very ones have become a strengthening aid to me."—Colossians 4: 7-11.

4 Paul made a powerful statement about the help his loyal friends rendered to him. He used a Greek word (*pa·re·go·ri'a*) translated "strengthening aid," which in the Bible is found only in this verse. This word has a range of meanings and was used especially in medicinal contexts.* It can be rendered 'solace, alleviation, comfort, or relief.' Paul needed that kind of strengthening, and those five men provided it.

* *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words,* by W. E. Vine, states: "A verbal form of the word [*pa·re·go·ri'a*] signifies medicines which allay irritation (Eng., 'paregoric')."

3, 4. (a) Who are five of Paul's friends, and what did they become to him? (b) What is "a strengthening aid"?

Why Paul Needed "a Strengthening Aid"

5 It may surprise some to think that Paul, an apostle, needed strengthening. Yet, he did. Granted, Paul had strong faith, and he had survived much physical abuse, "blows to an excess," "near-deaths often," and other pains. (2 Corinthians 11:23-27) Nonetheless, he was human, and all humans at one time or another need to receive comfort and to have their faith fortified with the help of others. This was true even of Jesus. During his last night, an angel appeared to him in Gethsemane and "strengthened him." —Luke 22:43.

6 Paul too needed strengthening. When he arrived as a prisoner in Rome, he was not warmly welcomed by people of his own race. These Jews were, on the whole, unreceptive to the Kingdom message. After the principal men of the Jews visited Paul in his place of confinement, the account in Acts states: "Some began to believe the things said; others would not believe. So, because they were at disagreement with one another, they began to depart." (Acts 28:17, 24, 25) How their lack of appreciation for Jehovah's undeserved kindness must have pained Paul! His strong feelings on this matter were evident in the letter he had written a few years earlier to the congregation in Rome: "I have great grief and unceasing pain in my heart. For I could wish that I myself were separated as the cursed one from the Christ in behalf of my brothers [the Jews], my relatives according to the flesh." (Romans 9:2, 3) Still, in Rome he did find loyal, true companions whose courage and

5. Despite his being an apostle, what did Paul need, and what do all of us need from time to time?

6, 7. (a) In Rome, who disappointed Paul, and who encouraged him? (b) What kind of services did Paul's Christian brothers render to him in Rome, thus proving to be "a strengthening aid"?

Brothers proved to be "a strengthening aid" to Paul by offering him their loyal support, encouragement, and personal services

affection soothed his heart. They were his *genuine* spiritual brothers.

7 How did those five brothers prove to be a strengthening aid? They did not permit Paul's prison bonds to make them shy away from him. Instead, they willingly and lovingly provided personal services for Paul, performing tasks that he was unable to perform himself because of his confinement. For example, they acted as messengers and delivered Paul's letters and verbal instructions to different congregations; they brought encouraging reports to Paul about the welfare of the brothers in Rome and elsewhere. They likely obtained needed items, such as winter clothing, scrolls, and writing tools. (Ephesians 6:21, 22; 2 Timothy 4:11-13) All such helpful deeds strengthened and encouraged the imprisoned apostle so that he, in turn, could be "a strengthening aid" to others, including entire congregations. —Romans 1:11, 12.

How to Be "a Strengthening Aid"

8 What can we learn from this account of Paul and his five fellow workers? Let us look at one lesson in particular: It takes courage and self-sacrifice to come to the aid of others in their adversity. Further, it takes humility to acknowledge that we may need help in times of personal distress. Not only did Paul admit that he needed help but he accepted that help graciously and commended those who gave it. He did not consider accepting help from others to be a sign of weakness or a humiliation on his part, and neither should we. For us to say that we never need strengthening aid would imply that we are superhuman. Remember, Jesus' example shows that even a perfect human may sometimes need to cry out for help.—Hebrews 5:7.

8. What lesson can we learn from Paul's humbly admitting his need for "a strengthening aid"?

9 Good results can come when those in responsible positions admit that they have limitations and that they are dependent on the support of others. (James 3:2) Such acknowledgments strengthen the bond between those with authority and those subject to that authority, promoting warm and free communication. The humility of those willing to accept help serves as an object lesson for others in a similar situation. It shows that those taking the lead are human and approachable.—Ecclesiastes 7:20.

10 For example, children may find it easier to accept their parents' help in dealing with problems and temptations when they know that their parents too faced comparable challenges when they were children. (Colossians 3:21) Lines of communication can thus be opened between parent and child. Scriptural solutions can be shared more effectively and be accepted more readily. (Ephesians 6:4) Similarly, congregation members will be more prepared to receive help from elders when they realize that elders too deal with problems, fears, and perplexities. (Romans 12:3; 1 Peter 5:3) Again, good communication can ensue, Scriptural counsel can be shared, and a strengthening of faith can result. Remember, our brothers and sisters need strengthening now more than ever.—2 Timothy 3:1.

11 No matter where we live, who we are, or how old we are, all of us will at times face stresses in life. This is part of today's world. (Revelation 12:12) Such physically or emotionally upsetting conditions test the quality of our faith. Trialsome situations may arise at work, in school, within the family, or in

9, 10. What good can result when a person acknowledges his need for help, and what influence can this have on others in the family and in the congregation?

11. Why are so many today in need of "a strengthening aid"?

Elders take the lead in strengthening the flock

the congregation. A serious illness or a past trauma could be the cause. If a marriage mate, an elder, or a friend kindly offers encouragement with thoughtful words and helpful deeds—oh, how soothing that can be! Why, it is like balm upon an irritated patch of skin! Hence, if you notice one of your brothers in such a state, be his strengthening aid. Or if an especially troubling problem is weighing you down, ask spiritually qualified ones for help.—James 5:14, 15.

How the Congregation Can Help

12 All in the congregation, including young ones, can do something to strengthen others. For one thing, your regularity at the meetings and in the field service does much to fortify the faith of others. (Hebrews 10:24, 25) Your constancy in sacred service is evidence of your loyalty to Jehovah and shows that you are keeping spiritually awake despite the difficulties you may be coping with. (Ephesians 6:18) That constancy can have a strengthening effect on others. —James 2:18.

13 At times, the pressures of life or other difficulties can cause some to slow down or become inactive in the field service. (Mark 4:18, 19) We may not see inactive ones at congregation meetings. Yet, they likely still have a love of God in their heart. What can be done to strengthen their faith? The elders can offer kind assistance by visiting them. (Acts 20:35) Other congregation members may be asked to assist too. Such loving visits can be just the right medicine, as it were, to revive those weak in faith.

14 The Bible exhorts us to "speak consolingly to the depressed souls, support the weak." (1 Thessalonians 5:14) Perhaps those "depressed souls" find that their courage is giving out and that they cannot surmount the obstacles facing them without a helping hand. Can you offer that helping hand? The expression "support the weak" has been rendered "to hold fast" or "to cleave to" the weak. Jehovah cherishes and loves all his sheep. He does not view them as of little worth, and he does not wish any to drift away. Can you help the congregation "to hold fast" to the spiritually weak until they are stronger?—Hebrews 2:1.

15 One elder visited a married couple who had been inactive for six years. The elder writes: "The kind and loving concern displayed toward them by the *entire congregation* had such a tremendous impact that it moved them to return to the flock." How did the once inactive sister feel about visits by congregation members? She now says:

12. What can each one in the congregation do to strengthen his brothers?
13. Why may some become inactive, and what can be done to help them?

14, 15. What counsel does Paul give about strengthening others? Give an example of one congregation that applied his counsel.

"What helped us to become active again was that neither the brothers who visited us nor the sisters who accompanied them ever showed a judgmental or critical attitude toward us. Rather, they were understanding and provided Scriptural encouragement."

16 Yes, a sincere Christian delights to be a strengthening aid to others. And as circumstances change in our lives, we ourselves may be the recipient of strengthening acts by our brothers. Realistically, though, it is possible that in a time of need, no human aid will be available. Nevertheless, there is one Source of strength who is always available, one who is always willing to help—Jehovah God.—Psalm 27:10.

Jehovah —The Ultimate Source of Strength

17 While nailed to the stake, Jesus cried out: "Father, into your hands I entrust my spirit." (Luke 23:46) Then he died. Just hours before, he had been arrested and his closest friends had abandoned him and fled in fear. (Matthew 26:56) Jesus was left alone with only one Source of strength—his heavenly Father. Still, his trust in Jehovah was not in vain. Jesus' loyalty to his Father was rewarded with Jehovah's own loyal support of him.—Psalm 18:25; Hebrews 7:26.

18 Throughout Jesus' ministry on earth, Jehovah provided his Son with what he needed to maintain integrity right up to his last breath. For instance, just after Jesus was baptized, marking the start of his ministry, he heard his Father's voice expressing approval and confirmation of His love for him. When Jesus had need of support, Jehovah dispatched angels to strengthen him. When Jesus faced his greatest test at the end of his earthly life, Jehovah favorably heard his supplications and petitions. Surely all of this was a strengthening aid to Jesus.—Mark 1:11, 13; Luke 22:43.

19 Jehovah wants to be our main Source of strength too. (2 Chronicles 16:9) The true Source of all dynamic energy and vigorous power can become a strengthening aid to us in our hour of need. (Isaiah 40:26) War, poverty, sickness, death, or our own imperfections can put us under immense pressure. When life's trials seem as overwhelming as a "strong enemy," Jehovah can be our strength and our might. (Psalm 18:17; Exodus 15:2) He has a powerful aid for us—his holy spirit. By means of his spirit, Jehovah can give "the tired one power" so that he can "mount up with wings like eagles." —Isaiah 40:29, 31.

20 God's spirit is the most powerful force in the universe. Paul stated: "For all things I have the strength by virtue of him who imparts power to me." Yes, our loving heavenly Father can infuse us with "power beyond what is normal" in order for us to endure all painful problems until he makes "all things new" in his promised Paradise so near at hand.—Philippians 4:13; 2 Corinthians 4:7; Revelation 21:4, 5.

16. Who is always prepared to help those who need strengthening?

17, 18. In what ways did Jehovah strengthen his Son, Jesus Christ?

19, 20. How can we be sure that Jehovah will strengthen us in our time of need?

Do You Recall?

- How did the brothers in Rome prove to be "a strengthening aid" to Paul?
- In what ways can we be "a strengthening aid" in the congregation?
- How is Jehovah our ultimate Source of strength?

WHILE I WAS BLIND, MY EYES WERE OPENED!

AS TOLD BY
EGON HAUSER

After two months of literal blindness, I had my eyes opened to Biblical truths that I had ignored during my entire life.

WHEN I reflect back over more than seven decades, many aspects of my life give me much satisfaction. But if I could change one thing, I would choose to have known about Jehovah God much earlier.

I was born in 1927 in Uruguay, a small pear-shaped country situated between Argentina and Brazil and favored with miles of beautiful scenery along the Atlantic Coast. The population is primarily made up of the descendants of Italian and Spanish immigrants. My parents, however, were Hungarian immigrants, and when I was very young, we lived in a humble, yet close-knit, neighborhood. There was no need for locks on our doors or bars on our windows. Racial prejudice did not exist among us. Foreigners and natives, blacks and whites—we were all friends.

My parents were practicing Catholics, and I became an altar boy at the age of ten. As an adult, I worked with the local parish and was a member of a group acting as consultants to the bishop in the diocese. Having chosen the medical profession, I was invited to participate in a seminar in Venezuela organized by the Catholic Church. As medical doctors specializing in gynecology, our group was assigned to study the oral contraceptives that were being introduced on the market at that time.

In my 30's, working at the hospital in Santa Lucía

Early Impressions as a Medical Student

When I was still a medical student learning about the human body, I became more and more impressed with the wisdom manifested in its design. For example, I was amazed at the body's ability to heal itself and recover from trauma, such as when the liver or some ribs are able to grow back to normal size after being partially removed.

At the same time, I saw many victims of serious accidents, and I was saddened when they died because of having received blood transfusions. I remember to this day how difficult it was to talk to relatives of patients who had died because of complications with blood. Most of the time, the relatives were not told that a blood transfusion had caused their loved one's death. Rather, they were given other reasons. Although many years have passed, I still remember my uneasy feelings about blood transfusions, and I finally came to the conclusion that there was something wrong with the practice. If only I had known then Jehovah's law regarding the sanctity of blood! In that case, I might not have had that uncertainty about what I saw being practiced.—Acts 15:19, 20.

Satisfaction From Helping People

In time, I became a surgeon and director of a medical assistance center in Santa Lucía. I also had responsibilities at the National Institute of Biological Science. This gave me much satisfaction. I helped people with their sicknesses, relieved their physical suffering, in many cases saved lives, and brought new lives into the world by assisting mothers during childbirth. Because of my earlier experiences with blood transfusions, I avoided administering them and performed thousands of operations without blood. I reasoned that a hemorrhage is like a leak in a barrel. The only real solution is to repair the leak, not to keep filling the barrel.

Treating Witness Patients

My acquaintance with Jehovah's Witnesses began in the 1960's when they started coming to our clinic for bloodless surgery. I will never forget the case of one patient, a pioneer (full-time minister) named Mercedes Gonzalez. She was so anemic that doctors at the university hospital would not risk operating on her, feeling certain that she would not survive. Although she was losing blood, we operated on her at our clinic. The surgery was successful, and she continued pioneering for over 30 years until her recent death at the age of 86.

I was always impressed by the love and interest the Witnesses showed while taking care of their hospitalized Christian brothers. When making my rounds, I enjoyed listening to them talk about their beliefs, and I accepted the publications they offered me. It never entered my mind that soon I would be not only their doctor but also their spiritual brother.

I became more closely connected with the Witnesses when I married Beatriz, the daughter of a patient. Most of her family were already associating with the Witnesses,

and after we were married, she too became an active Witness. I, on the other hand, was completely engrossed in my work and enjoyed a certain prominence in the medical field. Life seemed very good. Little did I know that my world was soon to collapse around me.

Adversity Strikes

One of the worst things that can happen to a surgeon is to lose his eyesight. That happened to me. Suddenly, I suffered the rupture of both retinas—I was blind and had no way of knowing if my vision could be restored. After being operated on, I lay in bed with both eyes bandaged and fell into depression. I felt completely useless and empty to the point that I decided to end my life. Since I was on the fourth floor, I got out of bed and felt my way along the wall, trying to find the window. I was going to jump to my death. However, I ended up in the hospital hallway, and a nurse ushered me back to my bed.

I did not try that again. But in my world of darkness, I continued depressed and irritable. During this period of blindness, I made God a promise that if I could ever see again, I would read the Bible from cover to cover. Eventually, my sight was partially restored, and I could read. But I could not continue as a surgeon. Still, in Uruguay there is a popular expression *"No hay mal que por bien no venga,"* "Nothing is so bad that something good cannot come from it." I was about to experience the truth of that saying.

Starting Off on the Wrong Foot

I wanted to buy the large-print edition of *The Jerusalem Bible,* but I learned that Jehovah's Witnesses had a less expensive Bible, which a young Witness offered to deliver to my home. The following morning, he was standing at my front door with the Bible. My wife opened the door and spoke to him. I rudely yelled from the back of the house that if she had paid him for the Bible, he had no further reason to be in my home and should leave, which, needless to say, he promptly did. I had no idea that this same person would soon play a significant role in my life.

One day I made a promise to my wife that I was unable to fulfill. So to compensate and to make her happy, I said that I would go with her to the annual Memorial of Christ's death. When the day arrived, I remembered my promise and attended the event with her. The friendly atmosphere and the kind welcome that I received impressed me. When the speaker began his talk, I was surprised to see that it was the same young man whom I had so impolitely asked to leave my house. His talk affected me deeply, and I felt very bad about treating him unkindly. How could I make up for it?

I asked my wife to invite him to dinner, but she suggested: "Don't you think it would be more appropriate if *you* invited him? Just stay here, and he will approach us." She was right. He came over to greet us and gladly accepted the invitation.

The conversation we had on the evening he came to visit was the beginning of many changes for me. He showed me the book *The Truth That Leads to Eternal Life,** and I showed him six copies of that same book. Different Witness patients had given them to me at the hospital, but I had never read them. During and after the meal, far into the night, I asked question after question —all of which he answered using the Bible. The discussion lasted into the early hours of the following morning. Before leaving, the young man offered to study the Bible

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

with me, using the *Truth* book. We finished studying that book in three months and continued with the book *"Babylon the Great Has Fallen!" God's Kingdom Rules!** After that, I dedicated my life to Jehovah God and was baptized.

With my wife, Beatriz, in 1995

Feeling Useful Again

As a result of literal blindness, 'the eyes of my heart' were opened to Bible truths that I had ignored until then! (Ephesians 1:18) Coming to know Jehovah and his loving purpose changed my entire life. Once again, I feel useful and happy. I help people both physically and spiritually and show them how to prolong their lives for a few more years in this system of things and for all eternity in the new.

I have kept up-to-date with medicine, and I have done research on blood risks, alternative treatments, patients' rights, and bioethics. I have had opportunities to share this information with the local medical community when I have been invited to talk on these subjects at medical seminars. In 1994, I attended the first congress on bloodless therapy in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, and gave a talk on how to deal with hemorrhages. Part of that information was included in an article I wrote, *"Una propuesta: Estrategias para el Tratamiento de las Hemorragias"* ("A Strategic Proposition for Anti-Hemorrhagic Treatment"), published in the medical magazine *Hemoterapia.*

Integrity Under Pressure

In the beginning, my doubts about blood transfusions were largely based on scientific knowledge. However, when I myself became a hospital patient, I found it to be quite a different thing to refuse blood transfusions and maintain my faith in the face of strong pressure from doctors. After a massive heart attack, I had to explain my position to a surgeon for over two hours. He was the son of very good friends of mine and said that he would not let me die if he thought that a blood transfusion could save my life. I silently prayed to Jehovah, asking him to help this doctor understand and respect my position even if he did not agree with it. Finally, the doctor promised to respect my wishes.

On another occasion, I had to have a large tumor removed from the prostate gland. There was a hemorrhage. Once again, I found myself explaining the reasons for my refusal of blood transfusions, and although I lost two thirds of my blood, the medical staff respected my position.

A Change of Attitude

As a member of the International Association of Bioethics, I have had the satisfaction of seeing a change in the attitude of medical staffs and legal authorities toward patients' rights. The doctors' paternalistic attitude is being replaced by respect for informed consent. They now permit patients to share in the choice of treatment. Jehovah's Witnesses are no longer thought of as fanatics who do not deserve medical attention. Rather, they are considered to be well-informed patients whose rights should be respected. At medical seminars and on television programs, well-known professors have said: "Thanks to the efforts of Jehovah's Witnesses, we now understand . . ." "We

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

have learned from the Witnesses . . ." and "They have taught us to improve."

It has been said that life is important above all because freedom, liberty, and dignity would be meaningless without it. Many now accept a superior legal concept, recognizing that each individual is the owner of his own personal rights and is the only one who can decide which of his rights should have priority under any given circumstance. In this way, dignity, freedom to choose, and religious beliefs are given priority. The patient has autonomy. Hospital Information Services, set up by Jehovah's Witnesses, has helped many doctors to progress in their understanding of these matters.

The continued support of my family has permitted me to be useful in Jehovah's service and also to serve as an elder in the Christian congregation. As I have already stated, I regret most not having learned about Jehovah earlier in life. Still, I am very grateful that he opened my eyes to the wonderful hope of living under God's Kingdom arrangement, where "no resident will say: 'I am sick.' "—Isaiah 33:24.*

* While this article was being prepared, Brother Egon Hauser passed away. He died faithful, and we rejoice with him that his hope is sure.

Ancient Sports and the Importance of Winning

"EVERY man taking part in a contest exercises self-control in all things." "If anyone contends . . . in the games, he is not crowned unless he has contended according to the rules."—1 Corinthians 9:25; 2 Timothy 2:5.

The games to which the apostle Paul referred were an integral feature of ancient Greek civilization. What does history tell us about such contests and the atmosphere that surrounded them?

Recently, an exhibition on the Greek games, *Nike—Il gioco e la vittoria* ("Nike—The Game and the Victory"), was held in Rome's Colosseum.* The exhibits offered some answers to that question and give food for thought regarding a Christian's view of sports.

An Ancient Institution

Greece was not the first civilization to engage in sports. Even so, in perhaps the eighth century B.C.E., the Greek

* *Nike* is the Greek word for "victory."

poet Homer described a society animated by heroic ideals and a competitive spirit, in which military prowess and athleticism were highly valued. The earliest of Greek festivals, explained the exhibition, began as religious events to honor the gods at the funerals of heroic figures. For example, Homer's *Iliad,* the oldest surviving work of Greek literature, describes how noble warriors, companions of Achilles, laid down their arms at the funeral rites for Patroclus and competed to prove their valor in boxing, wrestling, discus and javelin throwing, and chariot racing.

Similar festivals came to be celebrated throughout Greece. Says the exhibition handbook: "The festivals constituted a basic opportunity in which the Greeks, out of respect for their gods, put aside their endless and frequently violent disputes, and succeeded in sublimating their typical competitive spirit into a peaceful but equally sincere achievement: that of athletic competition."

Groups of city-states adopted the practice of regularly convening at common centers of worship to pay homage to their deities by means of athletic competitions. In time, four such festivals—the Olympic and the Nemean, both dedicated to Zeus, and the Pythian and the Isthmian, dedicated to Apollo and Poseidon respectively—grew in importance until they attained the status of Panhellenic festivals. That is, they were open to contestants from all over the Greek world. The festivals featured sacrifice and prayer and also honored the gods by superlative athletic or artistic competitions.

The oldest and most prestigious of such festivals, said to date back to 776 B.C.E., was held every fourth year in honor of Zeus at Olympia. Second in order of importance was the Pythian festival. Held close to the most celebrated oracle of the ancient world, at Delphi, this too included athletics. But in honor of the patron of poetry and music, Apollo, the emphasis was on song and dance.

The Events

Compared with modern athletics, the number of disciplines was quite limited, and only men took part. The program of the ancient Olympics never featured more than some ten events. The statues, reliefs, mosaics, and paintings on terra-cotta vases exhibited in the Colosseum offered snapshots of them.

There were footraces over three distances —the stadium, of about 220 yards; the double course, comparable to today's 440 yards; and the long race, of some 5,000 yards. Athletes ran and exercised completely nude. Contenders in the pentathlon competed in five disciplines: running, long jump, discus, javelin, and wrestling. Other matches included boxing and the pancratium, described as "a brutal sport that combined bare-knuckle boxing with wrestling." Then there was chariot racing over a distance of eight stadiums, with light open-backed vehicles mounted on small wheels and drawn by two or four colts or adult horses.

Boxing was extremely violent and sometimes fatal. Around their fists, contestants wore strips of stiff leather studded with devastating metal inserts. You can imagine why

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

You Can Make God Rejoice

Elderly Ones—Valuable Members of Our Christian Brotherhood

Abraham and Sarah —You Can Imitate Their Faith!

Chariot racing was the most prestigious of the events in ancient competitions

a certain contestant named Stratofonte could not recognize himself in a mirror after four hours of boxing. Ancient statues and mosaics testify that pugilists became horribly disfigured.

In wrestling, the rules restricted holds to the upper part of the body, and the winner was the one who first grounded his opponent three times. By contrast, in the pancratium no holds were barred. Contestants could kick, punch, and twist the joints. The only prohibitions were eye gouging, scratching, and biting. The aim was to immobilize one's opponent on the ground and force him into submission. Some considered it to be "the finest spectacle of all Olympia."

The most famous pancratium encounter in antiquity is said to have taken place at the Olympic final in 564 B.C.E. Arrhachion, who was being strangled, had the presence of mind to dislocate one of his rival's toes. His opponent, overcome by pain, submitted the very moment before Arrhachion died. The judges proclaimed Arrhachion's corpse the victor!

Chariot racing was the most prestigious of the events and also the most popular among aristocrats, since the winner was not the driver but the owner of the chariot and horses. Critical moments in the contest were at the start of the race, when charioteers had to stay in lane, and above all at each turn around the posts at either end of the track. Errors or fouls could provoke accidents that made this popular event even more spectacular.

The Prize

"Runners in a race all run," said the apostle Paul, "but only one receives the prize." (1 Corinthians 9:24) Winning was all that mattered. There was no silver or bronze, no second or third place. "Victory, 'Nike,' was the ultimate goal of the athlete," explained the exhibition. "Only this would suffice since only this was the true reflection of his personal character, both physical and moral, and the pride of his hometown." The attitude is summed up with a line from Homer: "I have learnt to excel always."

The prize accorded to a winner in the Panhellenic Games was purely symbolic—a crown of leaves. Paul called it "a corruptible crown." (1 Corinthians 9:25) Yet, the prize was charged with deep significance. It represented the very force of nature that bestowed its powers upon the winner. Victory, pursued with single-minded determination, meant no less than the bestowal of divine favor. Exhibits documented how ancient sculptors and painters imagined Nike, the winged Greek goddess of victory, extending the crown to the victor. A win at Olympia was the culmination of any athlete's career.

Olympic crowns were made of wild olive leaves—Isthmian of pine, Pythian of laurel, Nemean of wild celery. The organizers of games elsewhere offered monetary or other prizes to attract contestants of the highest

Ancient artists imagined Nike, the winged goddess of victory, crowning the victor

caliber. Several vases on display at the exhibition had been awards at the Panathenaic Games, held in Athens in honor of the goddess Athena. These amphorae originally contained precious Attic oil. A decoration on one side of one of the vases depicts the goddess and bears the phrase "prize for the contests of Athena." The other side has a depiction of a particular event, likely the one in which the athlete gained his victory.

Greek cities enjoyed sharing the fame of their athletes, whose victories transformed them into heroic figures in their home communities. The victors' returns were celebrated with triumphal processions. Statues to them were erected as offerings of thanks to the gods—an honor not otherwise accorded to mortals—and poets sang of their valor. Winners were thereafter accorded the first places at public ceremonies and received pensions at public expense.

Gymnasiums and Their Athletes

Athletic competition was considered an essential element in the development of the citizen-soldier. All Greek cities had their gymnasiums, where physical training for young men was combined with the teaching of intellectual and spiritual disciplines. The buildings of the gymnasiums were arranged around large open spaces for exercise, surrounded by porticoes and other covered areas used as libraries and classrooms. Such institutions were frequented, above all, by young men of wealthy families who could afford to dedicate time to education rather than to work. Here, athletes subjected themselves to long, intense preparation for the games with the help of trainers, who would also prescribe diets and ensure sexual abstinence.

The Colosseum exhibition offered visitors the opportunity to admire fine representations of ancient athletes, mostly Roman copies of original Greek sculptures. Since in classical ideology, physical perfection corresponded to moral perfection and was the exclusive possession of the aristocracy, these well-proportioned bodies of victorious athletes represented a philosophical ideal. The Romans appreciated them as works of art, many of which decorated stadiums, baths, villas, and palaces.

Among the Romans, violent spectacles were always popular, so of all Greek disciplines staged in Rome, boxing, wrestling, and the pancratium won the highest approval. The Romans regarded such sports, not as competition between equals to determine their respective virtue, but as simple entertainment. The original concept of sports as the collective participation of elite warrior-athletes as part of their education was abandoned. Instead, the Romans reduced Greek games either to healthy exercise before the bath or to a spectator sport practiced by lower-class professionals, much like gladiatorial contests.

Christians and the Games

The religious nature of the games was one reason for first-century Christians to shun them, for "what agreement does God's temple have with idols?" (2 Corinthians 6:14, 16) What of sports today?

Obviously, modern sports do not honor pagan gods. Yet, is it not true that some sports are surrounded by a near-religious fervor, comparable to that which existed among the ancients? Moreover, as reports over the last few years have shown, in order to win, some athletes have been willing to take performance-enhancing drugs that endanger their health and even their lives.

For Christians, physical achievement is of very limited worth. Spiritual qualities of "the secret person of the heart" are what make us beautiful in God's eyes. (1 Peter 3: 3, 4) We recognize that not all who take part in sports today have a fierce competitive spirit, but many do. Will association with them help us to follow the Scriptural exhortation to 'do nothing out of contentiousness, or out of egotism, but to have lowliness of mind?' Or will such association not result in "enmities, strife, jealousy, fits of anger, contentions, divisions"?—Philippians 2:3; Galatians 5:19-21.

Many modern contact sports have a potential for violence. Anyone attracted to such sports does well to remember the words of Psalm 11:5: "Jehovah himself examines the righteous one as well as the wicked one, and anyone loving violence His soul certainly hates."

In its right place, exercise can be enjoyable, and the apostle Paul did say that "bodily training is beneficial for a little." (1 Timothy 4:7-10) When he spoke of the Greek games, however, Paul appropriately referred to them merely to illustrate the importance for Christians to have such qualities as self-control and endurance. The goal Paul was striving to attain, above all else, was that of receiving the God-given "crown" of everlasting life. (1 Corinthians 9:24-27; 1 Timothy 6: 12) In that, he set an example for us.

The Boxer at Rest

This fourth-century B.C.E. bronze shows the devastating effects of ancient boxing, in which, according to the Rome exhibition catalog, "the resistance of the boxer . . . engaged in exhausting fights, during which 'wound was given for wound,' was extolled as a fine example." "Signs of the fight just concluded add to those of previous encounters," runs the description.

ARE YOU STRENGTHENED BY GOD'S WORD?

WHEN faced with challenges, how do you cope? In Jesus' case, recalling an appropriate scripture helped him to face Satan's challenges. (Matthew 4:1-11) Likewise, when King David faced personal trials, he was strengthened by God's Word. He said: "When my disquieting thoughts became many inside of me, your own consolations began to fondle my soul." —Psalm 94:19.

In a similar manner, recalling a favorite scripture can console us or give us strength when we face challenges. For example, Rex, who is now 89 years of age, has been a full-time evangelizer since 1931. Yet, he says: "I often felt inadequate when given a special assignment in the ministry." How did he cope? "I recalled my favorite scripture, Proverbs 3:5, which says: 'Trust in Jehovah with all your heart and do not lean upon your own understanding.' Recalling and applying this scripture helped me to carry out my assignments successfully."

Even young ones benefit from having a favorite scripture. Six-year-old Jack says that his favorite scripture is Matthew 24:14. This scripture motivates him to go preaching with his parents. He says: "I like going witnessing every Saturday with my mum, dad, and sister."

Like Jesus, do you sometimes face direct challenges to your faith? Then Philippians 4:13 may become one of your favorite scriptures. Like King David, do you suffer from "disquieting thoughts"? Then recalling Philippians 4:6, 7 may help you to cope. Do you sometimes worry that your service to God is in vain? Then remembering 1 Corinthians 15:58 will give you strength.

By memorizing appropriate scriptures, we allow God's Word to exert power in our lives. (Hebrews 4:12) Such favorite scriptures can provide us with both strength and comfort. —Romans 15:4.