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SONG 13

Christ, Our Model

PREVIEW

As true Christians, we need to “follow [Jesus’] steps closely.” What “steps” did Jesus leave for us to follow? This article will answer that question. It will also discuss why we should follow his steps closely and how we can do it.

“Follow His Steps Closely”

“Christ suffered for you, leaving a model for you to follow his steps closely.”—1 PET. 2:21.

IMAGINE that you are part of a group hiking through a dangerous, snow-covered wilderness. An experienced guide is leading you. As he walks, he leaves behind tracks, or footprints, in the soft snow. At some point, you cannot see the guide! But you do not panic. Rather, you and your fellow hikers follow the guide’s footprints as closely as you can!

² As true Christians, we are, in a sense, hiking through a dangerous wilderness—this wicked world. Fortunately, Jehovah has provided the perfect Guide—his Son, Jesus Christ, whose steps we can follow closely. (1 Pet. 2:21) According to one Bible reference work, Peter here uses the metaphor of a guide. Like a guide leaving behind tracks, Jesus has left behind footprints, or footsteps, that we can follow. Let us consider three questions about following his footsteps—what? why? and how?

WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FOLLOW JESUS’ FOOTSTEPS?

³ What does it mean to follow someone’s footsteps? In the Bible, the words “walk” and “feet” at times refer to a person’s course of life. (Gen. 6:9; Prov. 4:26) The example a person sets may be compared to footprints, or footsteps, that he leaves behind as he walks. So to follow someone’s footsteps means to follow his example, to imitate him.

1-2. How is it possible for us to follow Jesus’ steps? Illustrate.

3. What does it mean to follow someone’s footsteps?

⁴ What, then, does it mean to follow Jesus' footsteps? Put simply, it means to imitate his example. In our theme text, the apostle Peter is specifically commenting on the fine example Jesus set in the endurance of suffering; however, there are many other ways in which we can imitate Jesus. (1 Pet. 2:18-25) Really, Jesus' entire life course—everything he said and did—is an example for us to follow.

⁵ As imperfect humans, can we really follow Jesus' example? Yes, we can. Recall that Peter urges us "to follow [Jesus'] steps closely"—not perfectly. If we follow his footsteps carefully, doing the best we can as imperfect humans, we will be heeding the apostle John's words:

4. What does it mean to follow Jesus' footsteps?
5. Can imperfect humans really follow Jesus' perfect example? Explain.

"Go on walking just as that one [Jesus] walked."—1 John 2:6.

WHY FOLLOW JESUS' FOOTSTEPS?

⁶ *Following Jesus' footsteps will draw us closer to Jehovah.* Why can we say that? First, Jesus set an outstanding example of how to live in a way that pleases God. (John 8:29) So by following Jesus' footsteps, we will please Jehovah. And we can be sure that our heavenly Father will draw close to those who try hard to be his friends.—Jas. 4:8.

⁷ Second, Jesus imitated his Father perfectly. That is why Jesus could say: "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father also." (John 14:9) When we imitate Jesus' qualities and ways of dealing with

- 6-7. Why can we say that following Jesus' footsteps will draw us closer to Jehovah?

Jesus has left behind
footsteps for us to
follow closely
(See paragraphs 1-2)



others—for example, his pity for a leper, his empathy for a woman with a grievous illness, his compassion for the bereaved—we are imitating Jehovah as well. (Mark 1:40, 41; 5:25-34; John 11:33-35) The more we become like Jehovah, the closer we draw to him.

⁸ ***Following Jesus’ footsteps helps us not to be distracted by this wicked world.*** On the final night of his earthly life, Jesus was able to say: “I have conquered the world.” (John 16:33) He meant that he had refused to allow himself to be influenced by the thinking, the goals, and the actions of this world. Jesus never allowed himself to lose his focus on the reason he was sent to earth—to vindicate Jehovah. What about us? In this world, there are many things that could distract us. But if, like Jesus, we keep focused on doing Jehovah’s will, we too will “conquer” the world.—1 John 5:5.

⁹ ***Following Jesus’ footsteps leads to everlasting life.*** When a rich young man asked what he needed to do to gain everlasting life, Jesus replied: “Come be my follower.” (Matt. 19:16-21) To some Jews who did not believe that he was the Christ, Jesus said: “My sheep . . . follow me. I give them everlasting life.” (John 10:24-29) To Nicodemus, a member of the Sanhedrin who became interested in Jesus’ teachings, Jesus said that those “exercising faith in him” would “have everlasting life.” (John 3:16) We exercise faith in Jesus by acting on what he taught both by word and by example. If

8. Explain why following Jesus’ footsteps will help us “conquer” the world.

9. What must we do to stay on the road to everlasting life?



we do that, we will stay on the road to everlasting life.—Matt. 7:14.

HOW CAN WE FOLLOW JESUS’ FOOTSTEPS CLOSELY?

¹⁰ Before we can follow Jesus’ footsteps closely, we must come to know him. **(Read John 17:3.)** “Coming to know” Jesus is an ongoing process. We must become better and better acquainted with him—learning about his qualities, his thinking, and his standards. No matter how long we have been in the truth, we must keep working at coming to know Jehovah and his Son.

¹¹ To help us come to know his Son, Jehovah lovingly included the four Gospels in his Word. The Gospels contain a historical account of the life and ministry of Jesus. That account tells us what Jesus

10. What is involved in “coming to know” Jesus better? (John 17:3)

11. What do the four Gospels contain?



Like Jesus, commend others who
are giving Jehovah their best
(See paragraphs 19-20)

said, shows us what he did, and reveals to us how he felt. These four books help us to “consider closely” the example of Jesus. (Heb. 12:3) In effect, they contain the footsteps that Jesus left behind. So by examining the Gospels, we can come to know Jesus better and better. As a result, we can follow his steps closely.

¹² To benefit fully from the Gospels, we must do more than just read them. We need to take the time to study them carefully and meditate on them deeply. (Compare Joshua 1:8, footnote.) Let us discuss two suggestions that can help us to meditate on the Gospels and apply what we read in them.

¹³ **First, bring the Gospel accounts to life.** Use your imagination to see, hear, and feel what was happening. To help you do that, do some research in the

study aids provided by Jehovah’s organization. Examine the context—the events that come before or follow after the passage you are studying. Look for information that explains the background and the circumstances. Compare the account you are studying with a parallel account in another Gospel. Sometimes one Gospel writer includes a meaningful detail that another leaves out.

¹⁴ **Second, apply the Gospel accounts in your life.** (John 13:17) After you have carefully studied a Gospel account, ask yourself: ‘Is there a lesson in this account that I can apply in my life? How can I use this account to help someone else?’ Try to think of a specific individual, and then at an appropriate time, lovingly and tactfully share the lesson you learned.

12. How can we benefit fully from the Gospels?

13. How can you bring the Gospel accounts to life?

14-15. How can we go about applying the Gospel accounts in our life?

¹⁵ Let us consider an example of how we can apply these two suggestions. We will examine the account of the needy widow whom Jesus observed in the temple.

THE NEEDY WIDOW IN THE TEMPLE

¹⁶ **Bring the account to life. (Read Mark 12:41.)** Picture the scene. It is Nisan 11, 33 C.E.—less than a week before Jesus’ death. Jesus has spent much of the day teaching in the temple. His religious opposers have not made it easy for him. Earlier, some of them questioned his authority. Others tried to corner him with challenging questions. (Mark 11:27-33; 12:13-34) Now Jesus has moved to another part of the temple. Here—likely in the area called the Court of the Women—he can see the treasury chests along the walls of the court. He sits down and begins observing the people as they put their contributions in the chests. He sees many rich people depositing many coins. Perhaps he is close enough to hear a loud jingling as their coins drop into the chests.

¹⁷ **Read Mark 12:42.** After a while, one woman catches Jesus’ attention. She is a poor, “needy widow.” (Luke 21:2) Life is very difficult for her; she likely struggles to obtain the basic necessities of life. Yet, she goes to one of the chests and discreetly puts in two small coins, which perhaps hardly make a sound as they are dropped into the chest. Jesus knows what she deposited—two lepta coins, the smallest coins in circulation at the time. That is not even enough money to buy

a single sparrow, among the cheapest birds sold for food.

¹⁸ **Read Mark 12:43, 44.** Jesus is deeply impressed by this widow. So he calls his disciples, draws their attention to the widow, and says: “This poor widow put in more than all the others.” Then he explains: “They [especially the rich people] all put in out of their surplus, but she, out of her want, put in everything she had, all she had to live on.” When this faithful widow gave her last bit of money that day, she was putting her life in Jehovah’s caring hands.—Ps. 26:3.

¹⁹ **Apply the account in your life.** Ask yourself, ‘What lesson can I learn from Jesus’ words about the poor widow?’ Think about that widow. No doubt she wished that she could have given more to Jehovah. Yet, she did what she could; she gave Jehovah her very best. And Jesus knew that her contribution was precious in his Father’s eyes. Here, then, is an important lesson for us: Jehovah is pleased when we give him our best—our wholehearted and whole-souled service. (Matt. 22:37; Col. 3:23) Jehovah is happy when he sees us doing all we can! That principle applies to the amount of time and energy we can devote to our worship, including the ministry and the meetings.

²⁰ How can you apply the lesson from the account about the widow? Try to

16. Describe the scene recorded at Mark 12:41.

17. What did the poor widow mentioned at Mark 12:42 do?

18. According to Mark 12:43, 44, what did Jesus say about the widow’s contribution?

19. What important lesson can we learn from Jesus’ words about the poor widow?

20. How can you apply the lesson from the account about the widow? Give an example.

think of specific individuals who may need to be reassured that their efforts are pleasing to Jehovah. For example, do you know of an older sister who perhaps feels guilty or useless because she no longer has the health or energy to do as much as she used to in the ministry? Or can you think of a brother with a chronic, painful illness who gets discouraged because he cannot be at the Kingdom Hall for every meeting? Help such ones by speaking words that are “good for building up.” (Eph. 4:29) Share with them the heartwarming lesson we learned from the account about the poor widow. Your encouraging words can reassure them that Jehovah is pleased when we give him our best. (Prov. 15:23; 1 Thess. 5:11) When you commend others for giving Jehovah their best—no matter how small it may seem—you are following Jesus’ footsteps closely.

²¹ How thankful we are that the Gospel accounts provide so many details about Jesus’ life, enabling us to imitate him, to follow his footsteps closely! Why not have a personal study or Family Worship project that focuses on the Gospels? Let us remember that to benefit fully from such a study, we need to bring the accounts to life and apply them in our life. In addition to imitating what Jesus *did*, we need to listen to what he *said*. In the next article, we will consider what we can learn from Jesus’ final words as a human.

21. What are you determined to do?

PICTURE DESCRIPTION Pages 4-5: After meditating on what Jesus said about the poor widow, a sister commends an older sister for her whole-souled service.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- | | | |
|---|--|---|
| ■ What does it mean to follow Jesus’ footsteps? | ■ Why should we follow Jesus’ footsteps? | ■ How can we benefit fully from a study of the Gospels? |
|---|--|---|

SONG 17

“I Want To”

PREVIEW

As Matthew 17:5 tells us, Jehovah wants us to listen to his Son. In this article, we will discuss a number of lessons we can learn from the words Jesus spoke when he was dying on the torture stake.

Learning From Jesus’ Final Words

*“This is my Son, the beloved, whom I have approved.
Listen to him.”—MATT. 17:5.*

IT IS daytime, Nisan 14, 33 C.E. After being falsely accused and being judged guilty of a crime he did not commit, Jesus is mocked, cruelly tortured, and then nailed to a torture stake. Nails pierce his hands and feet. Every breath he takes, every word he speaks, is painful. But he must speak—he has important things to say.

² Let us discuss the words Jesus spoke as he was dying on the torture stake and the lessons we can learn from them. In other words, let us “listen to him.”—Matt. 17:5.

“FATHER, FORGIVE THEM”

³ **What did Jesus say?** Upon being nailed to the stake, Jesus prayed: “Father, forgive them.” Forgive whom? We find a clue in the words that follow: “They do not know what they are doing.” (Luke 23:33, 34) Jesus was likely referring to the Roman soldiers who drove the nails through his hands and feet. They did not know who he really was. He may also have had in mind some in the crowd who had demanded his execution but would later exercise faith in him. (Acts 2:36-38) Jesus refused to allow the injustices he had suffered to make him bitter and resentful. (1 Pet. 2:23) Instead, he asked Jehovah to forgive those putting him to death.

1-2. Describe the setting in which Jesus spoke his final words as a human.

3. To whom was Jesus likely referring when he said: “Father, forgive them”?

4 *What can we learn from Jesus' words?*

Like Jesus, we need to be willing to forgive others. (Col. 3:13) Some, including relatives, may oppose us because they do not understand our beliefs and our way of life. They may lie about us, humiliate us in front of others, destroy our literature, or even threaten to cause us physical harm. Rather than harboring resentment, we can ask Jehovah to open the eyes of those who oppose us so that they may one day see the truth. (Matt. 5:44, 45) At times, we may find it hard to forgive, especially if we have experienced gross injustices. But if we allow bitterness and resentment to take root in our heart, we hurt ourselves. One sister explained: "I realize that being forgiving does not mean that I condone offenses or allow others to take advantage of me. It just means that I choose to let go of resentment." (Ps. 37:8) When we decide to forgive, we are choosing not to let negative experiences make us bitter.—Eph. 4:31, 32.

"YOU WILL BE WITH ME IN PARADISE"

5 *What did Jesus say?* Two criminals were being executed alongside Jesus. At first, the two joined in reproaching him. (Matt. 27:44) But later, one of them had a change of heart. He came to the conclusion that Jesus had done "nothing wrong." (Luke 23:40, 41) What is more, he expressed his belief that Jesus would be resurrected from death and rule as a king someday. He said to the dy-

ing Savior: "Jesus, remember me when you get into your Kingdom." (Luke 23:42) What faith that man showed! In answer, Jesus said to him: "Truly I tell you today, you will be with me [not in the Kingdom, but] in Paradise." (Luke 23:43) Notice that Jesus made that promise very personal by referring to "I," "you," and "me." Knowing that his Father is merciful, Jesus spoke words that gave hope to this dying criminal.—Ps. 103:8.

6 *What can we learn from Jesus' words?*

Jesus is a perfect reflection of his Father. (Heb. 1:3) Jehovah is eager to forgive us and to show us mercy if we are truly sorry for the bad things we have done in the past and we exercise faith that we can obtain forgiveness of our sins through the shed blood of Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:7) Some may find it difficult to believe that Jehovah could ever forgive them for their past mistakes. If you feel that way at times, consider this: Shortly before he died, Jesus made an expression of mercy to the condemned criminal who was just beginning to show faith. So how much more would Jehovah show mercy to his faithful worshippers, who are doing their best to obey his commandments!—Ps. 51:1; 1 John 2:1, 2.

"SEE! YOUR SON! . . . SEE! YOUR MOTHER!"

7 *What did Jesus say? (Read John 19:26, 27.)* Jesus was concerned about his mother, who was likely a widow. His siblings could perhaps care for her

4. What can we learn from Jesus' willingness to forgive his opposers?

5. What did Jesus promise one of the criminals being executed alongside him, and why did he make that promise?

6. What do we learn from Jesus' words to the criminal?

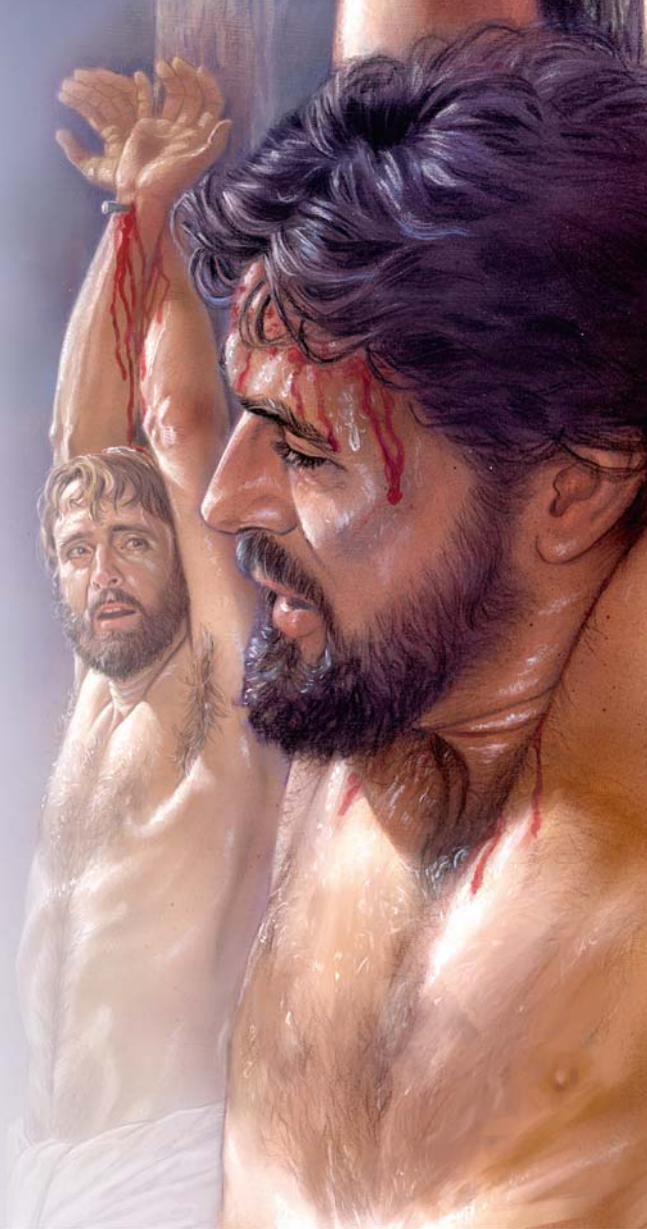
7. What did Jesus say to Mary and John, as recorded at John 19:26, 27, and why did he say this?

What We Learn From Jesus' Final Words

1. **"Father, forgive them."**
We need to be willing to forgive others.
2. **"You will be with me in Paradise."**
Jehovah is eager to show mercy to us.
3. **"See! Your son! . . . See! Your mother!"**
We have a wonderful spiritual family.
4. **"My God, why have you forsaken me?"**
Jehovah may not shield us from challenges that test our faith.
5. **"I am thirsty."**
It is not a sign of weakness to ask for help.
6. **"It has been accomplished!"**
We must be determined to maintain our integrity every day.
7. **"Into your hands I entrust my spirit."**
Our life is safe in Jehovah's hands.

physical and material needs. But who could care for her spiritual needs? There is no indication that his brothers were as yet disciples. However, John was a faithful apostle and one of Jesus' closest friends. Jesus viewed those who joined him in worshipping Jehovah as his spiritual family. (Matt. 12:46-50) Therefore,

moved by love and concern for Mary, Jesus entrusted her care to John, knowing that he would care for her spiritual welfare. To his mother, he said: "See! Your son!" And to John, he said: "See! Your mother!" From that day on, John became like a son to Mary and cared for her as if she were his mother. What



love Jesus showed to the precious woman who had tenderly cared for him at his birth and was standing near him at his death!

⁸ What can we learn from Jesus' words? Our bond with our Christian brothers and sisters can be stronger than our ties to immediate family members. Our relatives may oppose us or even abandon us, but as Jesus promised, by sticking to Jehovah and His organization, we will “get 100 times more” than we have lost. Many will become to us like a loving son, daughter, mother, or father. (Mark 10: 29, 30) How do you feel about being part of a spiritual family who are united by faith and love—love for Jehovah and for one another?—Col. 3:14; 1 Pet. 2:17.

“MY GOD, WHY HAVE YOU FORSAKEN ME?”

⁹ What did Jesus say? Shortly before his death, Jesus called out: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matt. 27:46) The Bible does not explain why Jesus said this. Consider, though, what those words tell us. For one thing, by saying these words, Jesus was fulfilling the prophecy found at Psalm 22:1.* Furthermore, the words made it clear that Jehovah was not keeping “a protective hedge around” his Son. (Job 1:10) Jesus understood that his Father had released him fully into the hands of his enemies so that he could be tested to the limit

* For a discussion of possible reasons why Jesus quoted from Psalm 22:1, see “Questions From Readers” in this issue.

8. What can we learn from Jesus' words to Mary and John?

9. What do Jesus' words recorded at Matthew 27: 46 tell us?

—as no human has ever been tested. In addition, these words confirmed that he was innocent of any crime deserving of death.

¹⁰ What can we learn from Jesus' words? One lesson we can learn is that we must not expect Jehovah to shield us from challenges that test our faith. Just as Jesus was tested to the limit, we too must be prepared to prove faithful to death if necessary. (Matt. 16: 24, 25) However, we have the assurance that God will not let us be tested beyond what we can bear. (1 Cor. 10:13) Another lesson we learn is that, like Jesus, we may suffer unjustly. (1 Pet. 2:19, 20) Those who oppose us do so, not because we have done something wrong, but because we are no part of the world and we bear witness to the truth. (John 17:14; 1 Pet. 4:15, 16) Jesus understood why Jehovah allowed him to suffer. Unlike him, however, faithful worshippers under trial have sometimes wondered why Jehovah allowed certain things to happen. (Hab. 1:3) Our merciful and patient God understands that such ones do not lack faith; they need the comfort that only he can provide.—2 Cor. 1:3, 4.

“I AM THIRSTY”

¹¹ What did Jesus say? (Read John 19: 28.) Why did Jesus say: “I am thirsty”? He did so “in order to fulfill the scripture”—that is, the prophecy found at Psalm 22:15, which states: “My strength has dried up like a piece of pottery; my

10. What lessons can we learn from Jesus' words to his Father?

11. Why did Jesus speak the words found at John 19:28?

tongue sticks to my gums.” Also, after all that Jesus had suffered, including the agonizing pain on the torture stake, he must have been very thirsty. He needed help to quench his thirst.

12 *What can we learn from Jesus’ words?* Jesus did not consider it to be a sign of weakness to express how he felt; nor should we. For much of our life, we may have preferred not to tell others about our needs. But if the time comes when we need help, we should not hesitate to ask others for assistance. For example, if we are older or infirm, we may have to ask a friend to give us a ride to a grocery store or to a doctor’s appointment. If we are downhearted or discouraged, we may need to ask an elder or other mature Christian friend to provide a listening ear or to share “a good word” to cheer us up. (Prov. 12:25) Let us remember that our brothers and sisters love us, and they want to help us in “times of distress.” (Prov. 17:17) But they cannot read our minds. They may not know that we need help unless we take the initiative to say something.

“IT HAS BEEN ACCOMPLISHED!”

13 *What did Jesus say?* About three o’clock on the afternoon of Nisan 14, Jesus called out: “It has been accomplished!” (John 19:30) With his death just moments away, Jesus had completed all that Jehovah expected him to do. By maintaining his integrity till he died, Jesus accomplished a number of things.

12. What can we learn from Jesus’ words “I am thirsty”?

13. What did Jesus accomplish by maintaining his integrity down to death?

First, he proved Satan a liar. Jesus showed that a perfect human could keep perfect integrity in spite of all that Satan could do. Second, Jesus gave his life as a ransom. His sacrificial death made it possible for imperfect humans to have a righteous standing with God, and it gave them the prospect of living forever. Third, Jesus upheld the righteousness of Jehovah’s sovereignty and cleared his Father’s name of reproach.

14 *What can we learn from Jesus’ words?* We must be determined to maintain our integrity every single day. Consider the comments of Brother Maxwell Friend, who served as an instructor at the Watchtower Bible School of Gilead. At an international assembly, Brother Friend said in a talk about faithfulness: “Don’t postpone for tomorrow what you can do or say today. Are you sure there will be a tomorrow? Live each day as if it were your last chance to show yourself worthy of living forever.” May we live each day as if it were our last chance to maintain our integrity! Then, even if we should face death, we would be able to say, “Jehovah, I have done my best to keep my integrity, to prove Satan a liar, and to vindicate your name and your sovereignty!”

**“INTO YOUR HANDS
I ENTRUST MY SPIRIT”**

15 *What did Jesus say? (Read Luke 23:46.)* With complete confidence, Jesus said: “Father, into your hands I en-

14. How should we be determined to live each day? Explain.

15. According to Luke 23:46, what confidence did Jesus express?

trust my spirit.” Jesus knew that his future depended on Jehovah, and he was certain that his Father would remember him.

16 *What can we learn from Jesus’ words?* Be willing to put your life in Jehovah’s hands. To do that, you must “trust in Jehovah with all your heart.” (Prov. 3:5) Consider the example of Joshua, a 15-year-old Witness with a terminal illness. He refused to accept medical procedures that violate God’s law. Shortly before he died, he told his mother: “Mom, I’m in Jehovah’s hands. . . . I can tell you this, Mom, with all certainty: I know Jehovah is definitely going to bring me back in the resurrection. He has read my heart, and I truly love him.”* Each of us would do well to ask, ‘If I were to face a life-threatening situation that tests my faith, would I put my

* See the article “Joshua’s Faith—A Victory for Children’s Rights” in the January 22, 1995, issue of *Awake!*

16. What do you learn from the experience of a 15-year-old Witness?

life in Jehovah’s hands and trust in him to remember me?’

17 What powerful lessons we can learn from Jesus’ final words! We are reminded of the need to forgive others and to trust that Jehovah will forgive us. We are privileged to have a wonderful spiritual family of brothers and sisters who are ready to help us. But when we need help, we must take the initiative to ask for it. We know that Jehovah will help us endure any trial that comes upon us. And we see the importance of living each day as if it were our last day to prove our integrity, confident that our life is safe in Jehovah’s hands.

18 Truly, the words Jesus spoke as he was dying on the execution stake are filled with meaning! By applying the lessons we have learned, we will be heeding Jehovah’s own words regarding his Son: “Listen to him.”—Matt. 17:5.

17-18. What lessons have we learned? (See also the box “What We Learn From Jesus’ Final Words.”)

WHAT LESSONS HAVE YOU LEARNED FROM JESUS’ WORDS RECORDED AT . . .

■ Luke 23:34, 43, 46?

■ Matthew 27:46?

■ John 19:26-28, 30?

SONG 18

Grateful for the Ransom

PREVIEW

Why did Jesus suffer a cruel death? This article will answer that question. It will also help us to strengthen our appreciation for the ransom.

Continue Appreciating the Ransom

“The Son of man came . . . to give his life as a ransom in exchange for many.”—MARK 10:45.

WHEN the perfect man Adam sinned, he lost the opportunity for everlasting life not only for himself but also for his future children. There was no excuse for what Adam did. His sin was deliberate. But what about his children? They had played no role in Adam’s sin. (Rom. 5:12, 14) Could anything be done to rescue them from the death sentence that their forefather so richly deserved? Yes! Soon after Adam sinned, Jehovah progressively revealed how he would rescue millions of Adam’s offspring from the curse of sin and death. (Gen. 3:15) At his appointed time, Jehovah would send his Son from heaven “to give his life as a ransom in exchange for many.”—Mark 10:45; John 6:51.

² What is the ransom? When referred to in the Christian Greek Scriptures, the ransom is the price Jesus paid to buy back what Adam lost. (1 Cor. 15:22) Why do we need the ransom? Because Jehovah’s standard of justice as set out in the Law required that a life be given for a life. (Ex. 21:23, 24) Adam lost his perfect human life. To satisfy God’s justice, Jesus sacrificed his perfect human life. (Rom. 5:17) He thus becomes an “Eternal Father” to all those who exercise faith in the ransom.—Isa. 9:6; Rom. 3:23, 24.

³ Jesus was willing to sacrifice his life because of his great love for his heavenly Father and for us. (**Read John 14:31; 15:13.**) Moved by that love, he was determined to keep his integrity to the end and to accomplish

1-2. What is the ransom, and why do we need it?

3. According to John 14:31 and 15:13, why was Jesus willing to sacrifice his perfect human life?



Think about all the mistreatment Jesus endured to provide the ransom for us!
(See paragraph 4)

his Father's will. Jesus did so by remaining faithful until his death. As a result, Jehovah's original purpose for mankind and for the earth will be fulfilled. In this article, we will discuss why God allowed Jesus to suffer so much before he died. We will also briefly review the example of a Bible writer who deeply appreciated the ransom. And finally, we will discuss how we can show our thankfulness for the ransom and how we can deepen our appreciation for the sacrifice that Jehovah and Jesus provided for us.

WHY WAS JESUS ALLOWED TO SUFFER?

⁴ Imagine what the last day of Jesus' earthly life was like. Although he can call on legions of angels to protect him, he allows himself to be seized by Roman soldiers, who beat him mercilessly. (Matt. 26:52-54; John 18:3; 19:1) They use a whip that rips strips of flesh from his body. Later, they load a heavy beam on his lacerated back. Jesus begins to drag the stake to the place of execution, but soon a bystander is conscripted to carry it for him. (Matt. 27:32) When Jesus arrives at the place where he will die, his executioners nail his hands and his feet to the stake. The weight of Jesus' body tears at the nail wounds. His friends grieve and his mother weeps, but the Jewish rulers mock Jesus. (Luke 23:32-38; John 19:25) One agonizing hour follows another. His heart and lungs become strained, and his breathing becomes more difficult. With his dying breath, he utters one last triumphant prayer. He then bows his head and sur-

renders his life. (Mark 15:37; Luke 23:46; John 10:17, 18; 19:30) It was truly a slow, painful, humiliating way to die!

⁵ For Jesus, the manner of his execution was not the worst part of his ordeal. He was more distressed by the charge that was the basis for his execution. He was falsely accused of being a blasphemer—someone who had no respect for God or for God's name. (Matt. 26:64-66) The very thought of that charge tormented Jesus so much that he hoped his Father would spare him this humiliation. (Matt. 26:38, 39, 42) Why did Jehovah allow his beloved Son to suffer and die? Let us consider three reasons.

⁶ First, Jesus had to be hung on a stake to free the Jews from a special curse. (Gal. 3:10, 13) They had agreed to observe God's Law but had fallen far short of keeping it. As a result, this curse was in addition to their condemnation as offspring of sinful Adam. (Rom. 5:12) God's Law to Israel stated that a man who committed a sin deserving of death should be executed. Afterward, his dead body may be hung on a stake.* (Deut. 21:22, 23; 27:26) So by being hung on a stake, Jesus made it possible for the very nation that rejected him to benefit from his sacrifice.

⁷ Consider a second reason why God

* It was the Roman custom to nail or tie condemned ones to a stake while they were alive, and Jehovah allowed his Son to be put to death in that manner.

5. For Jesus, what was worse than the way he was killed?

6. Why did Jesus have to be hung on a torture stake?

7. What is a second reason why God allowed his Son to suffer?

4. Describe how Jesus died.

allowed his Son to suffer. He was training Jesus for his future role as our High Priest. Jesus experienced how difficult it is to obey God when under extreme test. He felt so much pressure that he prayed for help “with strong outcries and tears.” Certainly, having gone through wrenching emotional distress, Jesus himself understands our needs and “is able to come to [our] aid” when we “are being put to the test.” How grateful we are to Jehovah for appointing over us a merciful High Priest who can “sympathize with our weaknesses”! —Heb. 2:17, 18; 4:14-16; 5:7-10.

⁸ Third, Jehovah allowed Jesus to suffer so severely in order to answer an important question: Can humans demonstrate godly devotion even when severely tested? Satan says no! He claims that humans serve God for selfish reasons. And he believes that—like their forefather Adam—they are not devoted to Jehovah. (Job 1:9-11; 2:4, 5) Confident in the loyalty of his Son, Jehovah allowed Jesus to be tested to the limit of human endurance. Jesus maintained his integrity and proved Satan a liar.

A BIBLE WRITER WHO DEEPLY APPRECIATED THE RANSOM

⁹ The faith of many Christians has been sustained by the teaching of the ransom. They have kept on preaching despite opposition and have endured all sorts of trials right on into old age. Consider the example of the apostle John. He loyally preached the truth about

Christ and the ransom, likely for more than 60 years. When he was in his late 90’s, he was apparently considered to be such a threat to the Roman Empire that he was imprisoned on the isle of Patmos. His crime? “Speaking about God and bearing witness concerning Jesus.” (Rev. 1:9) What an outstanding example of faith and endurance!

¹⁰ John expresses his deep love for Jesus and his appreciation for the ransom in his inspired writings. They contain over 100 references either to the ransom or to the benefits that the ransom makes possible. For example, John wrote: “If anyone does commit a sin, we have a helper with the Father, Jesus Christ, a righteous one.” (1 John 2:1, 2) John’s writings also stress the importance of “witnessing concerning Jesus.” (Rev. 19:10) Clearly, John deeply appreciated the ransom. How can we show that we do too?

HOW CAN YOU SHOW YOUR THANKFULNESS FOR THE RANSOM?

¹¹ **Resist the temptation to sin.** If we truly appreciate the ransom, we will not take the attitude: ‘There is no need for me to put up much resistance when I am tempted. I can go ahead and commit a sin, and then I’ll ask for forgiveness.’ Rather, when we are tempted to do something wrong, we will say: ‘No! How could I do such a thing after everything Jehovah and Jesus have done for me?’ In line with that, we can ask Jehovah for strength, begging him: ‘Do not allow me to give in to temptation.’—Matt. 6:13.

8. What is a third reason why God allowed Jesus to be tested so severely?

9. What example did the apostle John set for us?

10. How do John’s writings show that he appreciated the ransom?

11. What can help us resist temptation?

If we truly appreciate the ransom, we will resist the temptation to sin

(See paragraph 11)



¹² ***Love your brothers and sisters.*** When we show such love, we also show appreciation for the ransom. Why? Because Jesus gave his life not just for us but also for our brothers and sisters. If he was ready to die for them, they clearly have great value in his eyes. **(Read 1 John 3:16-18.)** We express our love for our brothers and sisters by the way we treat them. (Eph. 4:29, 31-5:2) For example, we help them when they are sick or when they are enduring severe trials, including natural disasters. But what should we do when a fellow believer does or says something that offends us?

¹³ Are you inclined to hold a grudge against a fellow believer? (Lev. 19:18) If so, follow this advice: “Continue putting up with one another and forgiving one another freely even if anyone has a cause for complaint against another. Just as Jehovah freely forgave you, you must also do the same.” (Col. 3:13) Every time we forgive our brother

12. How can we apply the counsel found at 1 John 3:16-18?

13. Why should we be forgiving?

or sister, we prove to our heavenly Father that we truly appreciate the ransom. How can we continue to deepen our appreciation for this gift from God?

HOW CAN YOU DEEPEN YOUR APPRECIATION FOR THE RANSOM?

¹⁴ ***Thank Jehovah for the ransom.*** “I think that it is important to mention the ransom each day in my prayers and to thank Jehovah for it,” says an 83-year-old sister named Joanna, who lives in India. In your private prayers, think about specific mistakes you have made during the day and then ask Jehovah for forgiveness. Of course, if you have committed a serious sin, you will also need the help of the elders. They will listen to you and offer loving counsel from God’s Word. They will pray with you, asking Jehovah to continue applying the value of Jesus’ sacrifice “so that you may be [spiritually] healed.”—Jas. 5:14-16.

¹⁵ ***Meditate on the ransom.*** “When I

14. What is one way we can deepen our appreciation for the ransom?

15. Why should we take time to read about the ransom and meditate on it?

read of Jesus' suffering," says a 73-year-old sister named Rajamani, "my eyes fill with tears." You too may find it painful to think about how God's Son suffered so much. But the more you meditate on the sacrifice Jesus made, the deeper your love for him and for his Father will become. To help you meditate on the ransom, why not make this topic a special study project?

16 Teach others about the ransom. Each time we tell others about the ransom, our appreciation for it will grow. We have some excellent tools to use in teaching others why Jesus had to die for us. For example, we can use lesson 4 of the brochure *Good News From God!* That lesson has the title "Who Is Jesus Christ?" Or we could refer to chapter 5 of the book *What Can the Bible Teach Us?* That chapter is entitled "The Ransom—God's Greatest Gift." And each year we deepen our gratitude for the ransom by attending the Memorial of Jesus' death

16. How can teaching others about the ransom benefit us? (See cover picture.)

and by zealously inviting others to join us. What a privilege Jehovah has given us to teach others about his Son!

17 Without a doubt, we have good reason to develop and maintain deep appreciation for the ransom. Because of the ransom, we can have a close friendship with Jehovah even though we are imperfect. Because of the ransom, the works of the Devil will be completely broken up. (1 John 3:8) Because of the ransom, Jehovah's original purpose for the earth will be fulfilled. The entire planet will become a paradise. Everyone you meet will love Jehovah and serve him. Let us, then, each day look for ways to show our appreciation for the ransom—God's greatest gift to mankind!

17. Why is the ransom God's greatest gift to mankind?

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 18: Each brother resists a temptation—to look at inappropriate images, to smoke tobacco, or to accept a bribe.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- What is the ransom?
- Why did Jesus have to suffer and die?
- How can we deepen our appreciation for the ransom?

SONG 108

God's Loyal Love

PREVIEW

Some of our brothers and sisters find it hard to believe that Jehovah could ever love them. In this article, we will discuss why we can be sure that Jehovah loves us as individuals. We will also examine how we can overcome any doubts we may have about his love for us.

Jehovah Treasures You!

“Jehovah takes pleasure in his people.”—PS. 149:4.

JEHOVAH GOD “takes pleasure in his people.” (Ps. 149:4) What a delightful thought that is! Jehovah notices our good qualities; he sees our potential and draws us to himself. If we remain faithful to him, he will remain close to us forever!—John 6:44.

² Some may say, ‘I know that Jehovah loves his people as a group, but how can I be sure that Jehovah values me personally?’ What might cause someone to ask that question? Oksana,* who experienced a tragic childhood, says: “I was very happy when I got baptized and started to pioneer. But 15 years later, I was plagued by painful memories. I concluded that I had lost Jehovah’s favor and did not deserve his love.” Yua, a pioneer sister whose childhood was also far from ideal, states: “I dedicated my life to Jehovah because I wanted to make him happy. But I was convinced that he could never love me.”

³ Like the faithful Christians just mentioned, you love Jehovah deeply but may doubt that he loves you. Why do you need to be convinced that he truly cares for you? And what can help you to cope when you are gripped by negative thinking? Let us consider the answers to these questions.

* Some names have been changed.

1. What does Jehovah notice in his people?
2. Why do some find it hard to believe that Jehovah loves them?
3. What will we consider in this article?

DOUBTING JEHOVAH'S LOVE IS DANGEROUS

⁴ Love is a powerful motivating force. If we are convinced of Jehovah's love and support, we will be impelled to serve him wholeheartedly in spite of life's challenges. On the other hand, if we doubt that God cares for us, our "strength will be meager." (Prov. 24:10) And when we become discouraged and lose faith in God's love, we will be vulnerable to Satan's attacks.—Eph. 6:16.

⁵ Some faithful Christians in our time have been weakened spiritually by doubts. An elder named James says: "Even though I was serving at Beth-el and was enjoying my ministry in a foreign-language congregation, I wondered if Jehovah was really accepting my sacrifices. At one point, I even questioned whether Jehovah was listening to my prayers." Eva, who is also in full-time service, says: "I found that doubting

4. Why is it dangerous to doubt Jehovah's love for us?

5. What effect has doubting God's love had on some?

Jehovah's love is dangerous because doing so sends you into a downward spiral. This affects your appetite for spiritual things and undermines your joy in serving Jehovah." Michael, a regular pioneer and an elder, says: "If you don't believe that God cares for you, you will drift away from him."

⁶ These experiences illustrate just how spiritually harmful negative thinking can be. But what should we do when doubts about God's love find their way into our mind? We must immediately reject them! Ask Jehovah to help you replace those "disquieting thoughts" with 'the peace of God that will guard your heart and your mental powers.' (Ps. 139: 23; ftn.; Phil. 4:6, 7) And remember, you are not alone. Other faithful brothers and sisters are struggling with negative feelings. Even servants of Jehovah in the past had to deal with such challenges. Consider what we can learn from the example of the apostle Paul.

6. What must we do when doubts about God's love enter our mind?



Our heavenly Father
"takes pleasure" in
each of us
(See paragraph 1)

What counts with God is what we do *now* and in the *future*, not the mistakes we made in the *past* (See paragraph 11)



WHAT WE LEARN FROM PAUL'S EXPERIENCE

⁷ Do you sometimes feel weighed down by many responsibilities, unable to cope with them all? If so, you would understand Paul. He felt anxiety, not just for one congregation but “for all the congregations.” (2 Cor. 11:23-28) Do chronic health problems often rob you of your joy? Paul was afflicted by a persistent “thorn in the flesh,” which may have been a physical ailment, and he was desperate to be rid of it. (2 Cor. 12:7-10) Are you discouraged by your own imperfections? So was Paul at times. He called himself a “miserable man” because of his relentless battle with his own imperfections.—Rom. 7:21-24.

⁸ Despite facing various tests and discouraging circumstances, Paul kept on serving Jehovah. What gave him the strength to do so? Although he was keenly aware of his imperfections, he had unwavering faith in the ransom. He was familiar with Jesus' promise that “*everyone* exercising faith in [Jesus]

might . . . have everlasting life.” (John 3:16; Rom. 6:23) Paul certainly was among those who were exercising faith in the ransom. He was convinced that Jehovah is ready to forgive even those who have sinned seriously if they are repentant.—Ps. 86:5.

⁹ Paul also had faith in the power of God's love as expressed by Christ. (**Read Galatians 2:20.**) Notice the reassuring words at the end of that verse. Paul said: “The Son of God . . . loved *me* and handed himself over for *me*.” Paul did not put a limit on God's love, as if to say, ‘I can see why Jehovah would love my brothers, but he could not possibly love me.’ Paul reminded the Romans: “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for *us*.” (Rom. 5:8) God's love knows no boundaries!

¹⁰ **Read Romans 8:38, 39.** Paul was absolutely convinced of the power of God's love. He wrote that nothing “will be able to separate us from God's love.” Paul knew how Jehovah had patiently

7. What problems did Paul face?

8. What helped Paul cope with his problems?

9. What do we learn from Paul's words recorded at Galatians 2:20?

10. What do we learn from Romans 8:38, 39?

dealt with the nation of Israel. He also knew how Jehovah had shown mercy to him. We might sum up Paul's reasoning this way, 'Since Jehovah sent his own Son to die for *me*, do I have any reason to doubt his love?'—Rom. 8:32.

¹¹ **Read 1 Timothy 1:12-15.** There must have been times when Paul was tormented by his past. He referred to himself as the “foremost” sinner, and no wonder! Before coming to a knowledge of the truth, Paul relentlessly pursued Christians in one city after another, putting some in prison and voting for the execution of others. (Acts 26:10, 11) Can you imagine how Paul would have felt on meeting a young Christian whose parents had been executed with his approval? Paul regretted his mistakes, but he knew he could not change the past. He accepted that Christ had died for him, and he confidently wrote: “By God's undeserved kindness I am what I am.” (1 Cor. 15:3, 10) What is the lesson for us? Accept that Christ died for *you* and paved the way for you to enter into a warm, personal relationship with Jehovah. (Acts 3:19) What counts with God is what we do *now* and in the *future*, not the mistakes we made in the *past*, whether we were one of Jehovah's Witnesses at the time or not.—Isa. 1:18.

¹² When you think about Jesus' dying to cover your sins, you may say, 'I do not feel worthy of that honor.' Why might you feel that way? Our imperfect

11. Although Paul had committed such sins as those mentioned at 1 Timothy 1:12-15, why was he sure that God loved him?

12. How can the words recorded at 1 John 3:19, 20 help us if we feel worthless or unlovable?



How God's Word Helps Them

- “When I am absorbed in my *study of the Bible*, I am focused on Jehovah and on others.”—Michael
- “*Maintaining a spiritual routine* has prevented me from dwelling on negative thoughts. Although I may not always feel like reading or studying the Bible, when I do, I give Jehovah opportunities to remind me of his love.”—Kevin
- “I like to *read the book of Psalms*. My favorite is Psalm 27. Time and again, I read verses 1 to 6, 10, and 12 to 14 and meditate on them.”—Oksana
- “I make an effort to start the day by *reading a portion of God's Word* and lingering in prayer. I always find something in his Word that gives me the help that I need.”—James
- “I feel closest to Jehovah after *studying his Word*. Then my heart is calmer than ever. Jehovah has strengthened me and given me his peace. Studying God's Word has helped to convince me that Jehovah does not overlook me.”—Seiji

Have You Read It?

Have you benefited from the book *Draw Close to Jehovah*? If not, why not make reading it a personal study project? One reader from California, U.S.A., explained: “I would like to tell you how reading and meditating on this book has enriched my life and my relationship with our heavenly Father. I feel that Jehovah is my friend now. . . . I love Jehovah more than I think my heart can contain, and I know that this book is one of the reasons for such feelings.”

heart might deceive us, making us feel worthless or unlovable. (**Read 1 John 3:19, 20.**) At such times, we need to remember that “God is greater than our hearts.” Our heavenly Father’s love and forgiveness are far stronger than any negative feelings that may lurk in our heart. We need to convince ourselves to accept Jehovah’s view of us. To do that, we must study his Word often, pray to him frequently, and associate regularly with his loyal people. Why is doing those things so important?

HOW BIBLE STUDY, PRAYER, AND LOYAL FRIENDS CAN HELP

¹³ **Study God’s Word each day**, and you will see Jehovah’s warm personality more clearly. You will perceive his tender feelings for you. Meditating on a portion of God’s Word each day

13. How can studying God’s Word help us? (See also the box “How God’s Word Helps Them.”)

can help you think more clearly, “setting things straight” in your mind and heart. (2 Tim. 3:16) An elder named Kevin who struggled with feelings of low self-worth says: “Reading Psalm 103 and meditating on it has helped me come to my senses and grasp Jehovah’s true thoughts about me.” Eva, mentioned earlier, says: “I conclude the day quietly by meditating on Jehovah’s thoughts. It gives me a peaceful heart and builds my faith.”

¹⁴ **Pray frequently.** (1 Thess. 5:17) A solid friendship with a fellow human is based on frequent and heartfelt communication. The same is true of our friendship with Jehovah. When we express our feelings, thoughts, and concerns to him in prayer, we demonstrate that we have confidence in him and that we know he loves us. (Ps. 94:17-19; 1 John 5:14, 15) Yua, quoted earlier, says: “When I pray, I try to do more than just report my day’s activities. I open up to Jehovah and let him know my true feelings. Gradually, I have come to see Jehovah, not as the chief executive officer of a company, but as a Father who really loves his children.”—See the box “Have You Read It?”

¹⁵ **Associate with loyal friends;** they are a gift from Jehovah. (Jas. 1:17) Our heavenly Father shows personal interest in us by providing us with a spiritual family of brothers and sisters who show “love at all times.” (Prov. 17:17) In his letter to the Colossians, Paul

14. How can prayer help us?

15. How does Jehovah show personal interest in us?

mentioned certain Christians who had supported him, referring to them as “a source of great comfort.” (Col. 4:10, 11) Even Christ Jesus needed and appreciated the support he received from his friends, both angelic and human.—Luke 22:28, 43.

¹⁶ Are you benefiting fully from Jehovah’s gift of loyal friends? Sharing our concerns with a mature friend is not a sign of weakness; it can be a safeguard. Consider what James, quoted earlier, says: “Good friendships with mature Christians have been a lifeline. When negative thoughts overwhelm me, these precious friends listen patiently and remind me of their love for me. Through them, I can discern Jehovah’s personal love and care for me.” How important it is that we develop and maintain close friendships with our spiritual brothers and sisters!

16. How can loyal friends help us draw closer to Jehovah?

REMAIN IN JEHOVAH’S LOVE

¹⁷ Satan wants us to give up in the fight to do what is right. He wants us to believe that Jehovah does not love us, that we are not worth saving. But as we have seen, nothing could be further from the truth.

¹⁸ Jehovah loves you. You are a precious treasure in his eyes. If you obey him, you will “remain in his love” forever, as Jesus does. (John 15:10) So do not listen to Satan or to your self-condemning heart. Instead, listen to Jehovah, who sees the good in each one of us. Be convinced that he “takes pleasure in his people,” including you!

17-18. Whom must we listen to, and why?

PICTURE DESCRIPTION Page 22: In the past, Paul had many Christians taken away to prison. When he accepted what Jesus had done for him, he changed and encouraged his Christian brothers, some of whom may have been relatives of those he had persecuted.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- | | | |
|--|---|---|
| ■ Why must we overcome doubts about Jehovah’s love for us? | ■ What can we learn from the apostle Paul and modern-day servants of Jehovah? | ■ How can Bible study, prayer, and loyal friends help us? |
|--|---|---|



“Now I Love the Ministry!”

AS TOLD BY VANESSA VICINI

I GREW up in the country town of Balclutha, on the South Island of New Zealand. As a child, I felt close to Jehovah and loved being in the truth. The meetings were never a chore, and the congregation was a warm haven where I felt safe and happy. Although I was not outgoing by nature, I enjoyed sharing in the ministry each week. I didn’t hold back from preaching to my schoolmates and others. I was proud to be one of Jehovah’s Witnesses, and at 11 years of age, I dedicated my life to God.

I LOSE MY JOY

Sadly, as I entered the teenage years, my warm relationship with Jehovah cooled off. My schoolmates seemed to have almost limitless freedom, and I thought I was missing out. I felt burdened by parental rules and Christian standards, and spiritual activity seemed like hard work. Although I never questioned Jehovah’s existence, I started to feel spiritually hollow.

Yet, I avoided becoming inactive by giving Jehovah token service. When I did go witnessing, I was never prepared, so I struggled to start or hold a conversation. As a result, my ministry was unproductive and joyless, which only added to my negativity. I would ask myself, ‘How can anyone do this week after week, month after month?’

By the time I turned 17, I had an overwhelming desire for independence. So I packed my bags, left home, and moved to Australia. Seeing me leave was hard for my parents. They were concerned, but they



Working in field service in
Gleno, Timor-Leste

thought that I would keep up with my spiritual routine.

In Australia, my spirituality waned even more. My meeting attendance became sporadic. I gravitated toward young ones who, like me, were happy to attend a meeting one night but then go out drinking and dancing in nightclubs the next. Looking back, I realize that I had one foot in the truth and one in the world, but I didn't really feel that I belonged in either.

AN UNEXPECTED YET VALUABLE LESSON

About two years later, I briefly met a sister who unknowingly made me start thinking about where my life was going. I was living in a house with five single sisters, and we invited the circuit overseer and his wife, Tamara, to stay in our home for a week. While her husband attended to congregation matters, Tamara spent time with us girls

and laughed along with us. I liked that. She was so down-to-earth and easy to talk to. I found it amazing that someone so spiritual could be so much fun.

Tamara bubbled over with enthusiasm. Her love for the truth and for the ministry was contagious. She was delighted in giving Jehovah her best, while I was unhappy giving him token service. Her positive demeanor and genuine happiness had a profound impact on my life. Her example drew my attention to a fundamental Scriptural truth: Jehovah desires that all of us serve him “with rejoicing” and “with joyful shouting.” —Ps. 100:2.

REKINDLING MY LOVE FOR THE MINISTRY

I wanted the kind of joy that Tamara had, but to get that joy, I needed to make some big changes. It took time, but I eventually started to take small steps. I began preparing for the ministry, and I auxiliary pioneered from time to time. This helped me to ease my nervousness and feel more confident. As I used the Bible more often

With Alex, leaving for unassigned territory to distribute Memorial invitations



in the ministry, I experienced a real sense of satisfaction. Soon I was auxiliary pioneering every month.

I began to be drawn to friends of all ages who were doing well in the truth and who enjoyed their service to Jehovah. Their good example helped me to reevaluate my priorities and to develop a good spiritual routine. I began to enjoy the ministry even more, and eventually I started to serve as a regular pioneer. For the first time in years, I felt stable and happy and right at home in the congregation.

I FIND A PERMANENT PIONEER PARTNER

A year later, I met Alex, a kind, genuine person who loved Jehovah and the ministry. He was serving as a ministerial servant and had been pioneering for six years. Alex had also served for some time where the need was greater in Malawi. There he

associated with missionaries who left a lasting impression on him and encouraged him to continue keeping Kingdom interests in first place.

In 2003, Alex and I got married, and we have continued in the full-time ministry ever since. We have learned many wonderful lessons, and Jehovah has blessed us in countless ways.

A DOORWAY TO FURTHER BLESSINGS

In 2009, we were invited to serve as missionaries in Timor-Leste, a small country in the Indonesian archipelago. We were stunned, excited, and apprehensive all at the same time. Five months later, we arrived in the national capital Dili.

The move involved major changes in our lifestyle. We had to adapt to the new culture, language, food, and living conditions. In the ministry, we were often confronted



A



B

A. On our way to the territory

B. Showing a Caleb and Sophia video to some happy Timorese children

with the effects of poverty, poor education, and oppression. And we saw many who bore the physical and emotional scars of war and violence.*

The ministry was incredible! For example, I once met a sad 13-year-old girl named Maria.[#] Her mother had died a few years earlier, and she rarely saw her father. Like many children her age, Maria had no direction in life. I remember one occasion when she cried as she poured out her feelings. However, I had no idea what she was saying because I could not yet speak her language fluently. I prayed to Jehovah, asking him to help me encourage her, and then I began reading upbuilding scriptures to her. Over the next few years, I saw the truth transform Maria's demeanor, appearance, and life. She got baptized, and now she conducts her own Bible studies. Today, Maria has a big spiritual family and has found a new sense of belonging.

Jehovah is blessing the work in Timor-Leste. Although most publishers have been baptized in just the last ten years, many serve as pioneers, ministerial servants, or elders. Others work in the remote translation office and assist in producing spiritual food in local languages. It made me so happy to hear them sing at meetings, see the smiles on their faces, and observe their spiritual growth.

I COULD NOT IMAGINE A MORE ENJOYABLE LIFE

Our assignment in Timor-Leste was very different from life in Australia, but I could not have imagined a more enjoyable life. Sometimes we were packed into a little bus full of people, along with dried fish and piles of vegetables from the local market. On

* Beginning in 1975, Timor-Leste experienced two decades of warfare in a struggle for political independence.

[#] Name has been changed.



What a joy to study the Bible with such humble people!

some days, we would conduct a Bible study in a hot and humid little home that had dirt floors and chickens running around. Yet, despite the challenges, I often thought, 'This is awesome!'

Looking back, I am thankful that my parents did their best to teach me Jehovah's ways and supported me, even during my difficult teen years. Proverbs 22:6 has proved true in my case. Both Mum and Dad are proud of Alex and me; they are happy to see us being used by Jehovah. Since 2016 we have been serving in the circuit work in the Australasia branch territory.

It seems hard to believe that I once found the preaching work to be a chore. Now I love the ministry! I have come to realize that regardless of life's ups and downs, true joy comes only from serving God wholeheartedly. Indeed, the last 18 years of serving Jehovah with Alex have been the happiest years of my life. I now understand the truthfulness of what the psalmist David said to Jehovah: "All those who take refuge in you will rejoice; they will always shout joyfully. . . . And those loving your name will rejoice in you."—Ps. 5:11.



Why did Jesus just before his death quote David's words found at Psalm 22:1?

■ Among the last words Jesus spoke before his death were those recorded at Matthew 27:46: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” By saying this, Jesus fulfilled the words of the psalmist David recorded at Psalm 22:1. (Mark 15:34) It would be wrong to conclude that Jesus quoted these words because he was disappointed or because he had a momentary lack of faith. Jesus fully understood the reason why he needed to die, and he was willing to do so. (Matt. 16:21; 20:28) He also knew that at the time of his death, Jehovah would need to remove any “protective hedge” from around him. (Job 1:10) Jehovah thus allowed Jesus to prove beyond any doubt that he would re-

main faithful no matter what the circumstances of his death.—Mark 14:35, 36.

So why did Jesus utter the words of this psalm? Although we cannot be dogmatic, let us consider some possibilities.*

By uttering these words, was Jesus emphasizing that Jehovah would not intervene in his death? Jesus needed to pay the ransom without Jehovah's help. He was fully human and needed to die so as to “taste death for everyone.”—Heb. 2:9.

By quoting a few words from that psalm, was Jesus drawing attention to the whole psalm? It was common in those

* See also paragraphs 9 and 10 in the article “Learning From Jesus’ Final Words” in this issue.

days for Jewish people to commit many of the psalms to memory. By being reminded of one verse of a psalm, they would naturally be prompted to think about the entire psalm. If this is what Jesus had in mind, then he would have helped his Jewish followers to remember the many prophecies contained in this psalm about the events surrounding his death. (Ps. 22:7, 8, 15, 16, 18, 24) Also, toward the end of the psalm, the triumph of Jehovah's kingship is described as extending to the ends of the earth.—Ps. 22:27-31.

By quoting these words of David, was Jesus highlighting his own innocence?

Prior to his death, Jesus had to endure an illegal trial that found him guilty of blasphemy. (Matt. 26:65, 66) That trial was hastily convened late at night and was completely out of harmony with accepted legal standards. (Matt. 26:59; Mark 14:56-59) By quoting these words as a rhetorical question, Jesus may have been drawing attention to the fact that he had done nothing that deserved this type of punishment.

Was Jesus also reminding others that even though David, the writer of this psalm, was allowed to suffer, this did not mean that David had lost Jehovah's approval? David's question did not reveal a lack of faith. After raising the question, he went on to express confidence in Jehovah's saving power, and Jehovah continued to bless him. (Ps. 22:23, 24, 27) Similarly, even though Jesus, "the Son of David," was suffering on the torture stake, this did not mean that Jehovah no longer approved of Jesus.—Matt. 21:9.

Was Jesus expressing his intense grief over the fact that Jehovah had to withdraw His protection from him so that he could fully prove his integrity? Jehovah did not originally purpose for his Son to suffer and die. That became necessary only after the first rebellion. Jesus had done

nothing wrong, but he needed to suffer and die in order to answer the issues that Satan had raised and to provide the ransom price necessary to buy back what man had lost. (Mark 8:31; 1 Pet. 2:21-24) This could be accomplished only if Jehovah momentarily removed his protection from Jesus for the first time in his life.

Was Jesus trying to help his followers to focus on the reason why Jehovah allowed him to die in this manner?*

Jesus knew that this type of death as a criminal on a torture stake would stumble many. (1 Cor. 1:23) If his followers focused on the real reason for his death, they would understand its true significance. (Gal. 3:13, 14) They would then view him as a Savior and not as a criminal.

No matter what reason Jesus had for quoting these words, he realized that what he was experiencing was part of Jehovah's will for him. Shortly after quoting this psalm, Jesus said: "It has been accomplished!" (John 19:30; Luke 22:37) Yes, the momentary withdrawal of Jehovah's protection allowed Jesus to accomplish fully all that he was sent to earth to do. It also allowed him to fulfill all the things written about him "in the Law of Moses and in the Prophets and Psalms."—Luke 24:44.

* During his ministry, Jesus at times made comments or raised questions that did not necessarily reflect his own feelings. He did this to stimulate discussion among his followers.—Mark 7:24-27; John 6:1-5; see *The Watchtower*, October 15, 2010, pp. 4-5.

IN THIS ISSUE

Study Article 14: June 7-13 “Follow His Steps Closely”	2
Study Article 15: June 14-20 Learning From Jesus’ Final Words	8
Study Article 16: June 21-27 Continue Appreciating the Ransom	14
Study Article 17: June 28–July 4 Jehovah Treasures You!	20
LIFE STORY “Now I Love the Ministry!”	26
QUESTIONS FROM READERS	30

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