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THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



What Has Happened to Spiritual Values?



THE WATCHTOWER®

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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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Spiritual Values

Where Are They Heading?

"Fifteen couples attend a [Catholic] evening session for premarital counsel. Of the 30 persons present, only 3 claim to have faith."

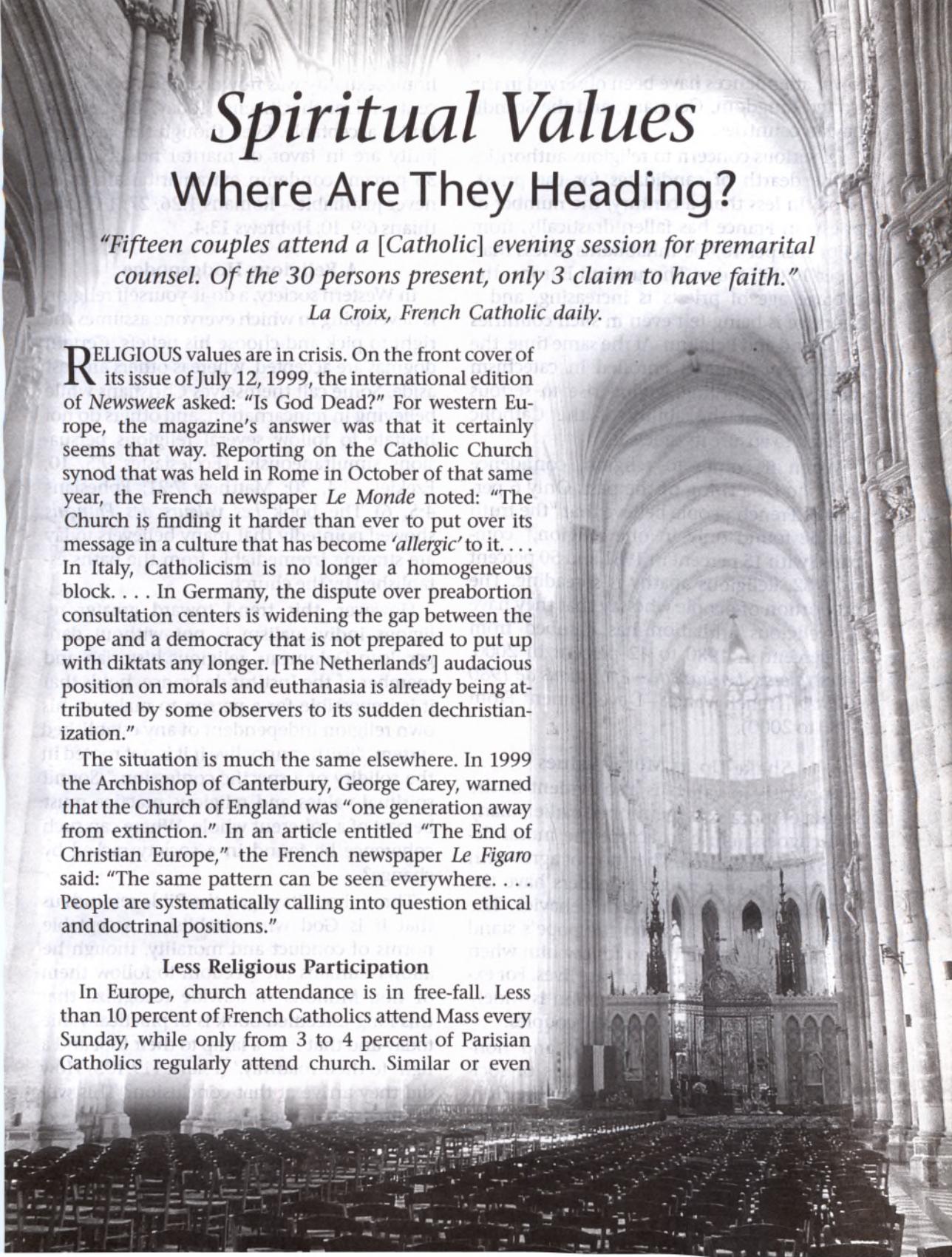
La Croix, French Catholic daily.

RELIGIOUS values are in crisis. On the front cover of its issue of July 12, 1999, the international edition of *Newsweek* asked: "Is God Dead?" For western Europe, the magazine's answer was that it certainly seems that way. Reporting on the Catholic Church synod that was held in Rome in October of that same year, the French newspaper *Le Monde* noted: "The Church is finding it harder than ever to put over its message in a culture that has become 'allergic' to it. . . . In Italy, Catholicism is no longer a homogeneous block. . . . In Germany, the dispute over preabortion consultation centers is widening the gap between the pope and a democracy that is not prepared to put up with diktats any longer. [The Netherlands'] audacious position on morals and euthanasia is already being attributed by some observers to its sudden dechristianization."

The situation is much the same elsewhere. In 1999 the Archbishop of Canterbury, George Carey, warned that the Church of England was "one generation away from extinction." In an article entitled "The End of Christian Europe," the French newspaper *Le Figaro* said: "The same pattern can be seen everywhere. . . . People are systematically calling into question ethical and doctrinal positions."

Less Religious Participation

In Europe, church attendance is in free-fall. Less than 10 percent of French Catholics attend Mass every Sunday, while only from 3 to 4 percent of Parisian Catholics regularly attend church. Similar or even



lower attendances have been observed in the United Kingdom, Germany, and the Scandinavian countries.

Of serious concern to religious authorities is the dearth of candidates for the priesthood. In less than a century, the number of priests in France has fallen drastically, from 14 priests per 10,000 inhabitants to less than 1 per 10,000 today. Throughout Europe, the average age of priests is increasing, and a shortage is being felt even in such countries as Ireland and Belgium. At the same time, the number of children enrolled in catechism classes is dwindling, giving rise to serious doubts about the ability of the Catholic Church to ensure its renewal.

When it comes to religion, confidence seems to be a thing of the past. Only 6 percent of French people believe that "the truth can be found only in one religion," compared with 15 percent in 1981 and 50 percent in 1952. Religious apathy is spreading. The proportion of people who say that they have no religious affiliation has climbed from 26 percent in 1980 to 42 percent in 2000. —*Les valeurs des Français—Évolutions de 1980 à 2000* (French Values—Development From 1980 to 2000).

Shake-Up in Moral Values

The crisis in values is also evident in the matter of morals. As mentioned earlier, many churchgoers refuse to accept the moral decrees of their church. They do not agree with the thought that religious leaders have the right to set the standards of behavior. The same crowds that applaud the pope's stand on human rights refuse to follow him when his words touch on their private lives. For example, his stand on contraception is widely ignored, even by many Catholic couples.

This attitude affects religious and non-religious people alike, at all levels of society. Practices clearly condemned in the Holy Scriptures are tolerated. Twenty years ago,

homosexuality was frowned upon by 45 percent of French citizens. Today, 80 percent find it acceptable. Even though the vast majority are in favor of marital fidelity, only 36 percent condemn extramarital affairs as never justifiable.—Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 10; Hebrews 13:4.

A Religious Hodgepodge

In Western society, a do-it-yourself religion is developing in which everyone assumes the right to pick and choose his beliefs. Certain dogmas are accepted, whereas others are cast aside. Some call themselves Christians while believing in reincarnation, and others do not hesitate to follow several religious persuasions simultaneously. (Ecclesiastes 9:5, 10; Ezekiel 18:4, 20; Matthew 7:21; Ephesians 4:5, 6) The book *Les valeurs des Français* showed pointedly that many believers today are straying irremediably from the paths established by the church.

However, this trend toward greater religious individualism is not without danger. Jean Delumeau, religious historian and member of the Institut de France, holds that it is impossible for a person to make up his own religion independent of any established system. "Faith cannot live if it is not rooted in the solidity of a specific confession." Sound spiritual values and religious practice must be part of a coherent whole. Where can such coherence be found in a society racked by change?

Throughout its pages, the Bible reminds us that it is God who establishes acceptable norms of conduct and morality, though he allows humans the freedom to follow them or not. Millions worldwide recognize that this long-esteemed book is of practical value today and that it is 'a lamp to their foot and a light to their roadway.' (Psalm 119:105) How did they arrive at that conclusion? This will be discussed in the next article.

Where Can You Find True Spiritual Values?

IF YOU are going to follow a religion simply because of family tradition, why not choose the Celtic religion that our ancestors practiced 2,000 years ago?" asks Rodolphe with a note of irony. The idea elicits a smile from his young listener.

"My relationship with God is very important to me," comments Rodolphe. "I'm totally against the idea that religious convictions should be forced on me by tradition, simply because members of my family who lived tens or even hundreds of years ago practiced a certain religion." Rodolphe weighed things carefully; he did not treat this important matter as just something he inherited.

Though the handing down of a religion from one generation to another is on the decline nowadays, the majority still remain attached to the religion of their family. But is it always right to stick to the religious values of one's parents? What does the Bible say?

After 40 years in the desert, Joshua, the successor of Moses, set a choice before the Israelites: "Now if it is bad in your eyes to serve Jehovah, choose for yourselves today whom you will serve, whether the gods that your fore-

fathers who were on the other side of the River served or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are dwelling. But as for me and my household, we shall serve Jehovah."—Joshua 24:15.

One of the forefathers Joshua referred to was Terah, the father of Abraham, who lived in the city of Ur, at the time situated east of the Euphrates River. The Bible does not reveal much about Terah, apart from the fact that he worshiped other gods. (Joshua 24:2) His son Abraham, while not having full knowledge of God's purpose, was willing to leave his home city when Jehovah commanded him to do so. Yes, Abraham chose a religion different from that of his father. For so doing, Abraham received the blessings that God promised him, and he became the person whom many religions recognize as the "father of all who believe in God."—Romans 4:11, *Today's English Version*.

The Bible also relates in a positive light the story of Ruth, an ancestress of Jesus Christ. Ruth, a Moabite woman who was married to an Israelite, became a widow and was faced with a choice: stay in her own country or return with her mother-in-law to Israel.

Recognizing the superior value of Jehovah's worship compared with the idolatrous worship practiced by her parents, Ruth declared to her mother-in-law:

Four generations of a family of Jehovah's Witnesses in France



"Your people will be my people, and your God my God."—Ruth 1:16, 17.

Commenting on the place of this record in the Bible canon, the *Dictionnaire de la Bible* explains that this account shows "how a woman of foreign birth, born among a pagan people hostile to and hated by Israel, . . . because of her love for Jehovah's nation and worship, quite providentially became an ancestress of holy King David." Ruth did not hesitate to choose a religion that was different from that of her parents, and as a result of that decision, she received God's blessing.

The account relating the beginning of Christianity is more explicit about the reasons why Jesus' disciples abandoned their ancestors' religion.

In a very persuasive speech, the apostle Peter invited his audience to "get saved from this crooked generation" by repenting of their sins and getting baptized in the name of Jesus Christ. (Acts 2: 37-41) One of the most remarkable examples was that of Saul, a Jewish persecutor of Christians. While on the road to Damascus, he saw a vision of Christ, after which Saul became a Christian and came to be known as the apostle Paul.—Acts 9:1-9.

The majority of early Christians did not have such a spectacular experience. Still, all had to abandon either Judaism or the worship of various pagan gods. Those who accepted Christianity did so in full knowledge of the facts, often after having had long discussions about the role of Jesus as the Messiah. (Acts 8:26-40; 13:16-43; 17:22-34) Those early Christians were clearly informed of the need to make changes in their lives. The invitation was given to all, both Jews and non-Jews, but the message remained the same. To please God, it was necessary to follow a new form of worship, that of Christianity.

A Choice Relevant for Us

It most certainly required courage in the first century to reject family religious traditions—Judaism, emperor worship, worship of pagan deities—and to join a movement that was derided by both Jews and Romans. This choice soon led to harsh persecution. Today, it takes similar courage to refuse to "let oneself be sucked in and caught up in the pervading atmosphere of conformism," as Hippolyte Simon, Catholic bishop of Clermont-Ferrand, puts it in his book *Vers une France païenne?* (The Paganization of France?) It requires courage to become associated with a minority religious movement that is at times criticized, Jehovah's Witnesses.

Paul, a young man from Bastia, Corsica, who was raised in the Catholic religion, occasionally took part in church activities, such as selling cakes to raise money for a Catholic charitable organization. Wanting to have a better understanding of the Bible, he agreed to have regular discussions with Jehovah's Witnesses. In time, he realized that what he was learning would bring him lasting benefits. Accordingly, Paul fully accepted the Bible's values and became one of Jehovah's Witnesses. His parents respected his choice, which has not affected their close family relationship.

Amélie lives in southern France. Members of her family have been Jehovah's Witnesses for four generations. Why did she choose to accept the religious values of her parents? "You don't become one of Jehovah's Witnesses because your parents or grandparents are or were Jehovah's Witnesses," she com-



ments. "But one day, you say to yourself, 'It's my religion because these are my convictions.'" Like many other young Witnesses of Jehovah, Amélie knows that her solid religious convictions give her a purpose in life and are a source of lasting happiness.

Why Accept Godly Values

The book of Proverbs, chapter 6, verse 20, encourages those who want to please God: "Observe, O my son, the commandment of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother." Rather than recommending blind obedience, such counsel exhorts youths to accept godly standards by deepening their faith and by taking their own stand for God. The apostle Paul invited his companions to "make sure of all things," to check whether what they were being taught was in harmony with the Word of God and His will, and to act accordingly.—1 Thessalonians 5:21.

Whether brought up in a Christian household or not, the more than six million Witnesses of Jehovah have made a conscious choice to serve Jehovah instead of the gods of this world.

**Ruth chose to serve
Jehovah instead of
her ancestors' gods**

nesses of Jehovah, both young and old, have made such a decision. Through a careful study of the Bible, they found trustworthy answers to their questions about the purpose of life and received a clear understanding of God's will for mankind. Upon obtaining this knowledge, they accepted God's values and do their best to do God's will.

Whether you are a regular reader of this magazine or not, why not accept the offer of Jehovah's Witnesses to help you look into the Bible to examine its spiritual values. In this way, you will be able to "taste and see that Jehovah is good" and acquire the knowledge that, when put into practice, leads to everlasting life.—Psalm 34:8; John 17:3.



When Preaching Is Especially Memorable

"The sun is beating down. The mountainous trail seems unending. After overcoming numerous obstacles, we at last reach our goal: the most distant village. Fatigue turns to joy when we knock on the first door and are received hospitably. By the end of the day, we have placed all the literature we brought and have started several Bible studies. The people are eager to learn. Now we have to leave, but we promise to return."

SUCH experiences are common among one group of pioneer ministers in Mexico. These are intent on sharing zealously in the fulfillment of the commission that Jesus Christ gave his disciples: "You will be witnesses of me . . . to the most distant part of the earth." (Acts 1:8) In Mexico, special preaching campaigns—called pioneer routes—are organized in order to reach territories that are not assigned to a congregation and, therefore, are not regularly receiving the good news of God's Kingdom. Generally, these are remote or hard to reach territories. Help is also given to isolated congregations that have an extensive territory to cover.

In order to determine what areas of the country will be covered by the pioneer routes, the branch office of Jehovah's Witnesses examines the needs of the territory.* Once this has been done, groups of special pioneers are assigned to cover the territory. They are provided with vehicles suitable for the rugged, unpaved roads. The vehicles also serve as literature storehouses and sleeping quarters when necessary.

Readily Responding

Since October 1996, invitations have been extended to other preachers of the good

* In a recent year, over 8 percent of the territory in Mexico was not being regularly covered by congregations of Jehovah's Witnesses. This means that there are over 8,200,000 people living in isolated areas where preaching is limited.

news to share in this activity, accompanying the special pioneers. Kingdom publishers as well as regular pioneers who are willing to serve where the need is greater, join the campaign at different stages. Some are assigned to congregations along the route in order to take care of the territory and cultivate the interest found. Many young publishers and pioneers have accepted these invitations and have been enriched with very encouraging experiences.

For example, Abimael, a young Christian who had a well-paying job in a mobile-phone company, decided to share in the preaching activity in those outlying regions. When his employers found out that he was going to quit, they offered him a promotion and a raise. Workmates pressured him, insisting that it was a unique opportunity and that it was foolish of him to turn it down. However, Abimael was determined to support the special preaching campaign for three months. After enjoying this service, Abimael has decided to stay indefinitely in an isolated congregation where the need for Kingdom publishers is great. He now has a modest job and has learned to simplify his life.

In another case, Julissa had to travel 22 hours by bus to get to her assignment. On the final leg of her trip, she missed the last bus of the day. However, there was a pickup truck that transported workers. Julissa mustered up



Many Mexican Witnesses have shared in special preaching campaigns

courage and asked them to take her. Understandably, she was apprehensive, being the only woman among so many men. When she began to preach to a young man, she realized that he was one of Jehovah's Witnesses! "Besides that," recalls Julissa, "the driver of the pickup turned out to be an elder in the congregation to which I was assigned!"

Older Ones Participate

This activity, however, is not just for the young. Adela, an older sister, had always wanted to devote more time to the preaching work. The opportunity presented itself when she received an invitation to participate in this special preaching activity. She relates: "I enjoyed my assignment so much that I asked the elders in the congregation to let me stay indefinitely. I am happy because even though I am older, I can still be useful to Jehovah."

Similarly, moved by appreciation for Jehovah and love for her fellowman, 60-year old Martha made herself available to share in the campaign. Observing that the distances involved and the difficult terrain of the territory prevented her group from reaching all the

people, she bought a car for the pioneers to use. This sister's contribution made it possible to cover more territory and to share Bible truth with more people.

Heartwarming Response

The goal of those who participate in these special preaching campaigns is to "make disciples." In this respect, the results have been excellent. Isolated people have received life-saving truths from the Bible. (Matthew 28: 19, 20) Many Bible studies have been established. These are cared for by publishers in the area or by evangelizers who have stayed in the territory. In some cases, groups of publishers have been organized, and in others, small congregations have even been formed.

Magdaleno and his companions used public transportation to get to the isolated territory where they were assigned. On the way, they took advantage of the opportunity to preach to the driver. "This man told us that the week before, some Witnesses had come to his home while he was away. When he returned, his family repeated to him what they had heard. We told him that we were not

from the vicinity but had come from several states in the country in order to support this special preaching campaign and that all of us had paid our own way. Impressed, the driver said that he would begin to study the Bible along with his family that same week. He even contributed to the work by not charging us for the trip."

Magdaleno was also very impressed by the response of the native peoples of the Chiapas mountains. "My wife and I had the experience of sharing the Kingdom message with a group of 26 young people who attended the Presbyterian Church. All of them listened attentively for 30 minutes. They took out their Bibles, and we were able to give them a thorough witness about Jehovah's purposes. The majority of the people have their own Bibles in the Tzeltal language." A number of progressive Bible studies were started.

Opposition Softened

A certain community in Chiapas had not been visited with the Bible message for over two years because of the opposition of some people. Teresa, a full-time evangelizer, noticed that some Witnesses were apprehensive about preaching in that village. "To the surprise of all, the people were willing to listen.

When we finished preaching, it began to rain very hard. Looking for shelter, we came to the home of a hospitable person named Sebastián, who allowed us to go inside and find shelter from the rain. Once inside, I asked him if he had already been visited. When he said no, I began to witness to him and started a Bible study using the book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*.* When we finished, Sebastián begged us with tears to come back to study with him."

Another group of pioneers who visited Chiapas reports: "Thanks to Jehovah, we had good results. In the first week, we started 27 studies; in the second, we invited the people to see our video *The Bible—Its Power in Your Life*. Sixty were in attendance. Everyone loved it. At the end, we proposed to start a group Bible study. Surprisingly, two study groups were formed in this village.

"After we finished working the assigned territories, we returned to visit the village to strengthen the interested ones and to see how the organized Bible study groups were doing. We invited them to a public meeting and to the *Watchtower Study*. However, there was no place big enough to hold the meet-

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.



ings. The person who offered his home for the study group pointed to the backyard of his house and said: 'The meetings can be held in the backyard.'

That weekend both the visiting pioneers and the interested people enthusiastically pitched in to prepare the yard so that it could be used for the meetings. There were 103 persons in attendance at the first meeting. Now 40 Bible studies are being conducted in that village.

"A Wonderful Experience"

Aside from having excellent results in the preaching work, those who have participated in this evangelizing activity have been greatly benefited themselves. María, a young pioneer who participated in one of these campaigns, expresses her feelings this way: "It was a wonderful experience for two reasons. My joy in the preaching work increased, and my relationship with Jehovah became closer. Once when we were climbing a mountain, we felt tired. After asking Jehovah for help, we experienced what Isaiah 40:29-31 says: 'Those who are hoping in Jehovah will regain power.' So we got there and conducted studies with people who received us very hospitably."

Another young pioneer, 17-year-old Claudia, tells us: "I have benefited a lot. I have learned to be more proficient in the ministry, which has given me a lot of joy, and this has led to my setting spiritual goals. I have also matured spiritually. At home my mother did everything for me. Now, with more experience, I have become more responsible. For example, I used to be very picky about what I ate. But now that I have had to adapt to different circumstances, I no longer complain about food. This form of service has helped me to cultivate very good friendships. We share everything we have and help one another."

A Joyful Harvest

What are the results of this special effort? By early 2002, some 28,300 pioneers had participated in these pioneer routes. They had conducted more than 140,000 Bible studies, devoting more than two million hours in the preaching work. To assist people to learn Bible truth, they had placed almost 121,000 books and close to 730,000 magazines. It is not unusual for some pioneers to conduct 20 or more Bible studies.

The recipients of this kindness are deeply grateful for the extra effort made to reach them with the Bible's message. Despite their poverty, many insist that the publishers accept donations. A needy 70-year-old lady always offers something to the pioneers who visit her. If they refuse to accept it, she cries. A family of little means tells the full-time evangelizers that the hen laid some eggs specifically for them and urges them to take the eggs.

More important, those sincere people show genuine appreciation for spiritual things. For instance, a young lady walks alone three-and-a-half hours to attend Christian meetings, not missing any of them. Despite having problems with her knees, an elderly interested woman traveled two hours in order to receive instruction from the Bible during the visit of the traveling overseer. Some who were illiterate wanted to learn to read and write so that they could benefit more from Bible education. Their efforts have been richly blessed.

In the book of Acts, Luke describes a vision that the apostle Paul saw: "A certain Macedonian man was standing and entreating him and saying: 'Step over into Macedonia and help us.'" Paul willingly followed through. Today, in the outlying areas of Mexico, many have responded with the same spirit, making themselves available to declare the good news "to the most distant part of the earth." —Acts 1:8; 16:9, 10.

YOUTHS WHO MAKE JEHOVAH'S HEART REJOICE

*"Be wise, my son, and make my heart rejoice,
that I may make a reply to him that is taunting me."*

—PROVERBS 27:11

IMAGINE that you are shopping for clothes. While browsing, you catch sight of a garment that immediately appeals to you. The color and style seem just right for you, and the price tag indicates that this is a real bargain. But then you take a closer look. Much to your surprise, you notice that the fabric is frayed at the edges, and the stitching is somewhat shoddy. The garment, while attractive, is cheaply made. Would you spend your money on such an inferior product?

² Compare this to a situation that could confront you as a Christian youth. At first glance, the things of this world—much like that garment—might seem highly appealing. For instance, your schoolmates may go to exciting parties, take drugs, drink, date casually, and engage in premarital sex. Are you, on occasion, attracted to such a life-style? Do you long for just a taste of their so-called freedom? If so, do not hastily con-

1, 2. (a) Explain whether mere attraction to the things of the world means that you are not cut out to be a Christian. (Romans 7:21) (b) What do you learn from Asaph's example? (See box, page 13.)



clude that you are bad at heart and just not cut out to be a Christian. After all, the Bible acknowledges that the world can be powerfully enticing—even to a person who wants to please God.—2 Timothy 4:10.

³ Now please take a closer look, just as you would at an item of clothing that you were interested in buying. Ask yourself, 'Of what quality is the fabric and stitching of this system of things?' The Bible states that "the world is passing away." (1 John 2:17)

Any pleasure derived from it would be temporary at best. Furthermore, ungodly conduct has a high price tag. It is certainly no bargain. One Christian, who has had to endure what she calls "the pains resulting from a misspent youth," says: "The world may appear to be glamorous and inviting. And it wants you to believe that you can have its form of fun without pain. But this simply isn't possible. The world will use you,

3. (a) Why is it futile to pursue the things of the world? (b) How does one Christian describe the vanity of worldly pursuits?

These study articles were prepared especially for youths among Jehovah's Witnesses. Therefore, we encourage young ones to study this material carefully and to comment freely when it is considered at the congregation Watchtower Study.

A Righteous Man Nearly Stumbles

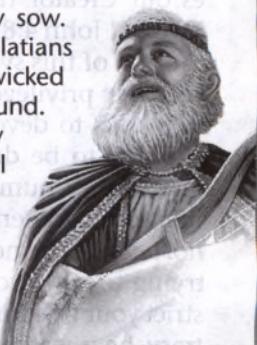
Asaph was a prominent Levite musician at Jehovah's temple in ancient Israel. He even composed songs that were used in public worship. Despite his unique privileges, though, for a time Asaph found himself attracted to the godless conduct of his peers, who seemed to break God's laws with impunity. "My feet had al-

most turned aside, my steps had nearly been made to slip," Asaph later admitted. "I became envious of the boasters, when I would see the very peace of wicked people." —Psalm 73:2, 3.

Later, Asaph went to God's sanctuary and prayed about the matter. With renewed spiritual vision, he understood that

Jehovah hates badness and that, in time, both the wicked and the righteous will reap what they sow. (Psalm 73:17-20; Galatians 6:7, 8) Really, the wicked are on slippery ground.

At the latest, they will experience a fall when Jehovah destroys this ungodly system.—Revelation 21:8.



and when it is through, it will throw you away."* Why waste your youth on such an inferior way of life?

Protection From "the Wicked One"

Realizing that this system of things has nothing of quality to offer, young ones among Jehovah's Witnesses strive to avoid friendship with this world. (James 4:4) Are you one of these faithful youths? If so, you are to be commended. Granted, it is not easy to resist peer pressure and to stand out as being different, but you have help.

Shortly before his death, Jesus prayed that Jehovah would "watch over" his disciples "because of the wicked one." (John 17:15) Jesus made this request for good reason. He knew that the course of integrity would not be easy for his followers, regardless of their age. Why? For one thing, as Jesus acknowledged, his disciples would face a powerful, invisible enemy—"the wicked one," Satan the Devil. The Bible says that this evil spirit creature "walks about

like a roaring lion, seeking to devour someone."—1 Peter 5:8.

Throughout history, Satan has taken sadistic delight in bringing the crudest of atrocities upon humans. Consider the horrific calamities that Satan brought upon Job and his family. (Job 1:13-19; 2:7) Perhaps you can recall news events during your own lifetime that bear the stamp of Satan's violent spirit. The Devil is on the prowl, and in his quest to devour, he shows no mercy to youths. At the turn of the first century C.E., for instance, Herod hatched a scheme to have put to death all boys in Bethlehem who were two years of age or younger. (Matthew 2:16) It was likely Satan who motivated Herod—all in an effort to destroy the child who would one day become God's promised Messiah and bring God's judgment upon Satan! (Genesis 3:15) Clearly, Satan has no soft spot for young people. His sole intention is to devour as many humans as possible. This is especially true now, for Satan has been cast out of heaven down to the earth, "having great anger, knowing he has a short period of time." —Revelation 12:9, 12.

4, 5. (a) Shortly before his death, what did Jesus request in prayer to Jehovah? (b) Why was this an appropriate request?

* See the article "The Truth Gave Me Back My Life," appearing in the October 22, 1996, issue of *Awake!*

6. How do we know that Satan has no compassion for young people?

⁷ In stark contrast with Satan, who has “great anger,” Jehovah has “tender compassion.” (Luke 1:78) He is the very epitome of love. In fact, this grand quality so characterizes our Creator that the Bible says: “God is love.” (1 John 4:8) What a difference between the god of this system of things and the God you are privileged to worship! While Satan seeks to devour, Jehovah “does not desire any to be destroyed.” (2 Peter 3:9) He views every human life as precious—including yours. When Jehovah in his Word exhorts you to be no part of the world, he is not trying to stifle your enjoyment of life or restrict your freedom. (John 15:19) On the contrary, he is watching over you because of the wicked one. Your heavenly Father wants you to have something far better than the fleeting pleasures of this world. His desire is that you attain to “the real life”—everlasting life on a paradise earth. (1 Timothy 6:17-19) Jehovah wants you to succeed, and he is urging you on toward that goal. (1 Timothy 2:4) Furthermore, Jehovah extends to you a special invitation. What is it?

“Make My Heart Rejoice”

⁸ Have you ever purchased a gift for a close friend and then watched your friend’s face beam with surprise and appreciation upon receiving it? You probably thought long and hard about what type of gift would be appropriate for that person. Now consider this question: What kind of gift can you offer your Creator, Jehovah God? At first, the very idea might sound absurd. What does the Almighty need from a mere human? What could you possibly give him that he does not already possess? The Bible answers at Proverbs 27:11: “Be wise, my son, and make my

7. (a) How does Jehovah stand out in stark contrast with Satan? (b) How does Jehovah feel about your enjoying life?

8, 9. (a) What gift can you present to Jehovah? (b) How does Satan taunt Jehovah, as illustrated in the case of Job?

heart rejoice, that I may make a reply to him that is taunting me.”

⁹ As you likely know from your study of the Bible, it is Satan the Devil who taunts Jehovah. He asserts that any who serve God do so, not out of love, but for selfish reasons. Let them suffer hardship, Satan claims, and they will quickly abandon true worship. Consider, for instance, what Satan said to Jehovah regarding the righteous man Job: “Have not you yourself put up a hedge about him and about his house and about everything that he has all around? The work of his hands you have blessed, and his livestock itself has spread abroad in the earth. But, for a change, thrust out your hand, please, and touch everything he has and see whether he will not curse you to your very face.”—Job 1: 10, 11.

¹⁰ As revealed in the Bible account, Satan called into question not only Job’s loyalty but also that of all others who serve God—including you. In fact, speaking of mankind in general, Satan said to Jehovah: “Everything that a man [not just Job but anyone] has he will give in behalf of his soul.” (Job 2:4) Do you see your role in this vital issue? As indicated at Proverbs 27:11, Jehovah is saying that there is something you can give to him—a basis for him to make a reply to his taunter, Satan. Imagine—the Universal Sovereign is calling upon you to share in addressing the greatest issue of all time. What an awesome responsibility and privilege is yours! Can you fulfill what Jehovah is asking of you? Job did. (Job 2:9, 10) So did Jesus as well as countless others throughout history, including many youths. (Philippians 2:8; Revelation 6:9) You can do the same. Make no mistake about it, though, there is no neutral ground in this matter. By your course of action, you will

10. (a) How do we know that Satan called into question the integrity of more than just Job? (b) How are you involved in the issue of sovereignty?

Jehovah has your best interests at heart, whereas Satan's goal is to devour you



show that you support either Satan's taunt or Jehovah's reply. Which will you choose to uphold?

Jehovah Cares for You!

¹¹ Does it really matter to Jehovah which choice you make? Have not enough people already remained faithful for him to give an adequate reply to Satan? True, the Devil asserted that no one serves Jehovah out of love, a charge that has already been proved false. Still, Jehovah wants you to take his side on the issue of sovereignty because he cares about you as an individual. Jesus said: "It is not a desirable thing with my Father who is in heaven for one of these little ones to perish."—Matthew 18:14.

¹² Clearly, Jehovah is interested in the course you choose. More than that, he is affected by it. The Bible makes clear that Jehovah has deep feelings that are stirred by the good or the bad actions of humans. For example, when the Israelites repeatedly rebelled, Jehovah was "pained." (Psalm 78:40, 41) Before the Deluge of Noah's day, when "the badness of man was abundant," Jehovah

11, 12. Does it make a difference to Jehovah whether you choose to serve him or not? Explain.

"felt hurt at his heart." (Genesis 6:5, 6) Think about what this means. If you adopted a wrong course, you could cause your Creator to feel pain. This does not mean that God is weak or is ruled by emotion. Rather, he loves you and cares about your welfare. On the other hand, when you do what is right, Jehovah's heart rejoices. He is happy not only because he has a further reply to give to Satan but also because he can now become your Rewarder. And that is something he wants to become. (Hebrews 11:6) What a loving Father you have in Jehovah God!

Rich Blessings Now

¹³ The blessings that come from serving Jehovah are not to be experienced only in the future. Many youths among Jehovah's Witnesses are blessed with joy and satisfaction right now, and for good reason. "The orders from Jehovah are upright, causing the heart to rejoice," wrote the psalmist. (Psalm 19:8) Better than any human, Jehovah knows what is good for us. Through the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah stated: "I, Jehovah, am your God, the One teaching you to benefit yourself,

13. How does serving Jehovah bring blessings right now?



Many youths are finding the greatest happiness by serving Jehovah with fellow Christians

the One causing you to tread in the way in which you should walk. O if only you would actually pay attention to my commandments! Then your peace would become just like a river, and your righteousness like the waves of the sea."—Isaiah 48:17, 18.

¹⁴ Conforming to Bible principles will help you to avoid much pain and heartache. For example, the Bible says that those who have developed a love for money "have stabbed themselves all over with many pains." (1 Timothy 6:9, 10) Have any of your peers experienced the harsh reality of this scripture? Some young men and women are heavily in debt simply because they must have the latest brand-name clothes and cutting-edge technological gadgets. Being saddled with long-term, high-interest payments for things you cannot really afford is a painful form of slavery!—Proverbs 22:7.

¹⁵ Consider also the matter of sexual immorality. Throughout the world each year,

14. How can Bible principles help you avoid the pain of debt?

15. In what ways do Bible principles protect you from the pain resulting from sexual immorality?

countless unwed teens become pregnant. Some give birth to a child that they have neither the desire nor the ability to raise. Others submit to an abortion and pay the price of a tormented conscience. Then there are young men and women who contract a sexually transmitted disease, such as AIDS. For one who knows Jehovah, of course, the greatest consequence of all would be a damaged relationship with Jehovah.* (Galatians 5:19-21) For good reason, the Bible says: "Flee from fornication."—1 Corinthians 6:18.

Serving "the Happy God"

¹⁶ The Bible describes Jehovah as "the happy God." (1 Timothy 1:11) He wants you to be happy too. In fact, his very own Word says: "Enjoy your youth. Be happy while you are still young." (Ecclesiastes 11:9, *Today's English Version*) But Jehovah sees beyond the present moment and can perceive the long-

* It is comforting to know that when a person repents, stops doing wrong, and confesses his sins, Jehovah "will forgive in a large way."—Isaiah 55:7.

16. (a) How do we know that Jehovah wants you to enjoy your youth? (b) Why does Jehovah set out guidelines for you to follow?

term consequences of both good and bad behavior. That is why he admonishes you: "Remember, now, your Grand Creator in the days of your young manhood, before the calamitous days proceed to come, or the years have arrived when you will say: 'I have no delight in them.'"—Ecclesiastes 12:1.

¹⁷ Today, many youths have found great happiness in serving Jehovah. For example, 15-year-old Lina says: "I can hold my head high. I have a healthy body because of abstaining from smoking and drugs. I have valuable guidance given me through the congregation that helps me to combat Satan's awful pressure. My face has a happy glow because of the upbuilding association made available at the Kingdom Hall. Best of all, I have the unbeatable prospect of eternal life on earth."

17, 18. How did one young Christian express her happiness in serving Jehovah, and how can you find the same joy?

Do You Recall?

- What danger do you face from "the wicked one," Satan?
- How can you make Jehovah's heart rejoice?
- How does the Bible show that Jehovah cares about you?
- What are some blessings that come from serving Jehovah?

¹⁸ Like Lina, many Christian youths are putting up a hard fight for the faith, and this brings them joy. They realize that their life—though challenging at times—has real purpose and a real future. Continue, therefore, to serve the God who has your best interests at heart. Make his heart rejoice, and he will make you rejoice now and to time indefinite!—Psalm 5:11.

YOUTHS—JEHOVAH WILL NOT FORGET YOUR WORK!

"God is not unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name, in that you have ministered to the holy ones and continue ministering."—HEBREWS 6:10.

HAVE you ever performed a kind deed for a friend and then received no expression of thanks? It can hurt deeply when a generous act is taken for granted or, worse yet, completely forgotten. How different it is, though, when we render wholehearted service to Jehovah! The Bible says: "God is not

1. How do the Bible books of Hebrews and Malachi show that Jehovah appreciates your service?

unrighteous so as to forget your work and the love you showed for his name, in that you have ministered to the holy ones and continue ministering." (Hebrews 6:10) Think about what that means. Jehovah would actually consider it an act of unrighteousness on his part—a sin—if he were to forget what you have done and what you continue to do in his service. What an appreciative God!—Malachi 3:10.

² You have a special opportunity to worship and serve this grateful God. Since there are only about six million of your fellow believers compared with some six billion people worldwide, your privilege is a rare one indeed. Furthermore, the fact that you are listening and responding to the message of the good news is evidence that Jehovah takes a personal interest in you. After all, Jesus said: "No man can come to me unless the Father, who sent me, draws him." (John 6:44) Yes, Jehovah helps people individually to take advantage of the benefits of Christ's sacrifice.

Appreciating Your Grand Privilege

³ As discussed in the preceding article, you are in a unique position to make Jehovah's heart rejoice. (Proverbs 27:11) This is something that you should never take for granted. In one of their inspired psalms, the sons of Korah expressed their appreciation for the privilege of serving Jehovah. We read: "A day in your courtyards is better than a thousand elsewhere. I have chosen to stand at the threshold in the house of my God rather than to move around in the tents of wickedness."—Psalm 84:10.

⁴ Is that the way you feel about your privilege to serve your heavenly Father? Admittedly, at times it may seem that worship of Jehovah restricts your freedom. It is true that living according to Bible principles requires a measure of self-sacrifice. Ultimately, though, whatever Jehovah asks of you is for your benefit. (Psalm 1:1-3) In addition, Jehovah sees your efforts and demonstrates his appreciation for your faithfulness. Indeed, Paul wrote that Jehovah "becomes the rewarder of those

2. What makes serving Jehovah truly special?
3. How did the sons of Korah express appreciation for the privilege of serving Jehovah?
4. (a) What might make some view worship of Jehovah as restrictive? (b) In what way does Jehovah show himself eager to notice and reward his servants?



Experienced ones can help to train youths to serve Jehovah

earnestly seeking him." (Hebrews 11:6) Jehovah is looking for opportunities to do this. A righteous prophet in ancient Israel stated: "As regards Jehovah, his eyes are roving about through all the earth to show his strength in behalf of those whose heart is complete toward him."—2 Chronicles 16:9.

⁵ One of the finest ways you can show that your heart is complete toward Jehovah is to talk to others about him. Have you ever had the opportunity to speak to some of your schoolmates about your faith? At first, doing this may seem daunting, and the very idea might cause a bit of fear. 'What if they laugh at me?' you may ask. 'What if they think that my religion is strange?' Jesus acknowledged

5. (a) What is one of the finest ways you can show that your heart is complete toward Jehovah? (b) Why might talking to others about your faith seem difficult?

that not everyone would listen to the Kingdom message. (John 15:20) This does not mean, however, that you are doomed to a life of ridicule and rejection. On the contrary, many Witness youths have found a listening ear and have even commanded greater respect from their peers by standing up for their convictions.

"Jehovah Will Help You"

⁶ But how can you summon the courage to speak up about your faith? Why not resolve to be honest and straightforward when people ask you about your religion? Consider the experience of 17-year-old Jennifer. "I was at lunch in school. The girls at my table happened to be discussing religion, and one of the girls asked me what religion I belonged to," she says. Was Jennifer nervous about giving a reply? "Yes," she acknowledges, "because I wasn't sure what kind of reaction I would get." So what did Jennifer do? "I told the girls that I was one of Jehovah's Witnesses," she continues. "At first they seemed surprised. Apparently, they had the notion that Jehovah's Witnesses were strange people. This prompted them to ask me questions, and I was able to clear up some misconceptions they had. Even after that day, some of the girls approached me from time to time with a question."

⁷ Did Jennifer regret having taken the opportunity to speak up about her beliefs? Not at all! "I felt very good about it when the lunch period was over," she says. "Now those girls have a better idea of who Jehovah's Witnesses really are." Jennifer's advice now is simple: "If you find it hard to witness to classmates or teachers, say a quick prayer. Jehovah will help you. You will be glad that you made good use of your opportunity to give a witness."—1 Peter 3:15.

6, 7. (a) How was one 17-year-old girl able to witness to her classmates? (b) What have you learned from Jennifer's experience?

⁸ Note that Jennifer recommends 'saying a quick prayer' to Jehovah when an opportunity presents itself to give a witness about your faith. This is precisely what Nehemiah, cupbearer to Persian King Artaxerxes, did when he faced an unexpected situation. Nehemiah was visibly distressed because he had been informed about the plight of the Jews and had learned that the wall and gates of Jerusalem were in ruins. The king noticed that Nehemiah seemed anxious, so he asked Nehemiah what was wrong. Before answering, Nehemiah prayed for guidance. Then he boldly requested permission to return to Jerusalem and help rebuild the fallen city. Artaxerxes granted Nehemiah's request. (Nehemiah 2:1-8) The lesson? If you feel nervous when an opportunity arises to give a witness concerning your faith, do not neglect your opportunity to offer a silent prayer. "Throw all your anxiety upon [Jehovah]," wrote Peter, "because he cares for you."—1 Peter 5:7; Psalm 55:22.

"Ready to Make a Defense"

⁹ Consider another experience. Leah, aged 13, was reading the book *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work** during her lunch break at school. "Others were watching me," she says, "and soon a crowd was hovering over my shoulder. They began asking what the book was all about." By the end of the day, four girls had asked Leah for a copy of the *Young People Ask* book. Soon these girls were sharing the book with others, and then they too wanted a copy. Over the next few weeks, Leah placed 23 copies of

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

8. (a) How did prayer help Nehemiah when he faced an unexpected situation? (b) What are some situations at school when you might need to offer a brief, silent prayer to Jehovah?
9. How was 13-year-old Leah able to place 23 copies of the *Young People Ask* book?

Even the Very Young Praise Jehovah!

Even preteens have been able to give a witness at school. Consider these experiences.



Ten-year-old Amber's fifth-grade class was reading a book on the Nazi assault on Jews during World War II. Amber decided to bring the video *Purple Triangles* to her teacher. The teacher was surprised to learn that Jehovah's Witnesses were also persecuted under the Nazi regime. The teacher showed the video to the entire class.

At eight years of age, Alexa wrote a letter to her class explaining why she could not take part in their Christmas celebration. Her teacher was so impressed that she had Alexa read the letter out loud to her own class and to two other classes as well! "I have been taught to be respectful of others whose beliefs differ from mine," she said toward the conclusion, "and I thank you for respecting my decision not to celebrate Christmas."



the *Young People Ask* book with her schoolmates and their friends. Was it easy for Leah to speak up when others initially inquired about the book she was reading? Hardly! "At first, I was nervous," she admits. "However, I prayed, and I knew that Jehovah was with me."

¹⁰ Leah's experience may remind you of a similar situation that confronted a young Israelite girl who had been taken captive to Syria. Naaman, a Syrian army chief, was a leper.
^{10, 11} How was a young Israelite girl able to help a Syrian army chief learn about Jehovah, and what changes did he thereafter make?

Shortly after beginning first grade, Eric took *My Book of Bible Stories* to school and asked permission to show it to his classmates. "I have a better idea," said his teacher. "Why don't you read a story to the class?" Eric did so. Afterward, he invited all who wanted a copy of the book to raise their hand.

Eighteen people—including the teacher—did so! Eric now feels that he has his own special witnessing territory.

Nine-year-old Whitney is grateful for the brochure *Jehovah's Witnesses and Education*.^{*} "My mom usually gives this brochure to my teachers every year," she says, "but this year I did it myself. Thanks to that brochure, my teacher nominated me 'student of the week.'"



* All the publications mentioned are produced by Jehovah's Witnesses.

His wife might well have initiated the conversation that prompted this little girl to speak up about her faith. "If only my lord were before the prophet that is in Samaria!" she said. "In that case he would recover him from his leprosy."—2 Kings 5:1-3.

¹¹ As a result of this young girl's boldness, Naaman came to know that "there is no God anywhere in the earth but in Israel." He even resolved that he would "no more render up a burnt offering or a sacrifice to any other gods but to Jehovah." (2 Kings 5:15, 17) Jehovah certainly blessed the courage of that little girl. He can and will do the same for young

ones today. Leah found that to be true. In time, some of her schoolmates approached her and said that the *Young People Ask* book was helping them with their behavior. "I was glad," Leah says, "because I knew that I was helping others to learn more about Jehovah and helping them to change their life."

¹² You can have experiences similar to those of Jennifer and Leah. Follow the admonition of Peter, who wrote that as a Christian you should always be "ready to make a defense before everyone that demands of you a reason for the hope in you, but doing so together with a mild temper and deep respect." (1 Peter 3:15) How can you do that? Imitate the course of the first-century Christians who prayed to Jehovah that he would help them to preach "with all boldness." (Acts 4:29) Then be courageous in talking to others about your beliefs. You may be surprised at the results. Moreover, you will make Jehovah's heart rejoice.

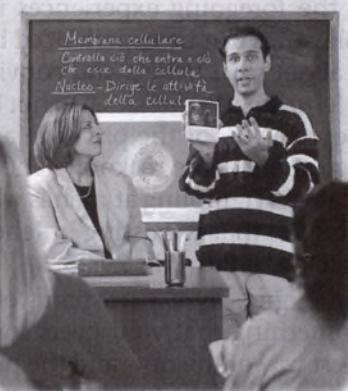
Videos and Special Projects

¹³ Many youths have explained their faith to schoolmates or teachers by using videos. At times, school projects have also opened up opportunity to bring praise to Jehovah. For example, two 15-year-old boys, both Jehovah's Witnesses, received an assignment as part of their world history class to write a report on one of the world's religions. These two teamed up to write their report on Jehovah's Witnesses, using the book *Jehovah's Witnesses—Proclaimers of God's Kingdom* as their source.* They also had to present a five-minute oral report. Afterward, the teacher and students had so many questions that

* Published by Jehovah's Witnesses.

12. How can you be strengthened to make a defense of your faith?
13. What opportunities have some youths taken advantage of to give a witness? (See boxes on pages 20 and 21.)

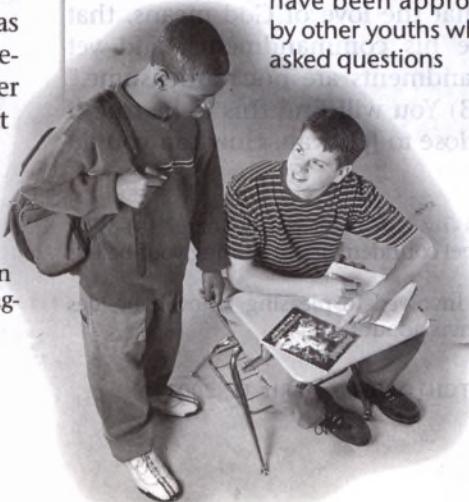
Situations Some Have Used to Speak About Their Faith



When assigned a school report or project, some have chosen a subject that allowed them to give a witness



A number of youths have given their teacher a video or a publication that relates to a subject being discussed in class



Some youths when reading the Bible or a Bible-based publication during recess have been approached by other youths who have asked questions

the boys were in front of the class for an additional 20 minutes. For several weeks thereafter, their classmates continued to ask questions about Jehovah's Witnesses!

¹⁴ As the foregoing experiences illustrate, great blessings can be experienced by telling others about your beliefs and convictions as one of Jehovah's Witnesses. Do not let fear of man deprive you of the privilege and joy of helping others come to know Jehovah. The Bible states: "Trembling at men is what lays a snare, but he that is trusting in Jehovah will be protected."—Proverbs 29:25.

¹⁵ Remember, as a Christian youth, you have something that your peers sorely need—the best way of life now and the promise of everlasting life for the future. (1 Timothy 4:8) Interestingly, in the United States—where you might think that people in general are apathetic or secular-minded—one poll revealed that fully half of the youths take religion very seriously, and a third say that religious faith is "the most important influence" in their life. The situation likely is similar in many other parts of the world. It may well be, then, that your peers at school would be glad to listen to what you have to say about the Bible.

As a Youth, Draw Close to Jehovah

¹⁶ Of course, making Jehovah's heart glad involves more than simply talking about him. You also need to conform your conduct to his standards. The apostle John wrote: "This is what the love of God means, that we observe his commandments; and yet his commandments are not burdensome." (1 John 5:3) You will find this to be true if you draw close to Jehovah. How can you do that?

14, 15. (a) Why is fear of man a snare? (b) Why should you feel confident about sharing your beliefs with others?

16. What is involved in pleasing Jehovah besides talking to others about him?

¹⁷ Take time to read the Bible and Bible-based publications. The more you learn about Jehovah, the easier it will be to obey him and to talk to others about him. "A good man brings forth good out of the good treasure of his heart," said Jesus, "for out of the heart's abundance his mouth speaks." (Luke 6:45) So fill your heart with good things. Why not set goals in this regard? Perhaps you can improve as to preparing for congregation meetings this coming week. Your next goal could be to participate by offering a brief but heartfelt comment. Of course, it is vital that you also put into practice the things you learn.—Philippians 4:9.

¹⁸ The blessings that come from serving Jehovah are long-lasting—indeed, everlasting. True, you occasionally may experience a degree of opposition or ridicule for being one of Jehovah's Witnesses. But think of Moses. The Bible says that "he looked intently toward the payment of the reward." (Hebrews 11:24-26) You too can be confident that Jehovah will reward you for the efforts you make to learn about him and talk about him. Indeed, he will never "forget your work and the love you showed for his name."—Hebrews 6:10.

17. How can you draw close to Jehovah?
18. Even if you suffer some opposition, of what can you be confident?

Do You Recall?

- Why can you be sure that Jehovah values your service?
- What methods of witnessing at school have some found to be successful?
- How can you be strengthened to witness to classmates?
- How can you draw close to Jehovah?

The Unlikely Marriage of BOAZ and RUTH

THE threshing floor near Bethlehem is alive with springtime activity. It has been a long day. The aroma of freshly roasted grain lets the hungry workers know that it is time to eat. Each one will enjoy the fruits of his labor.

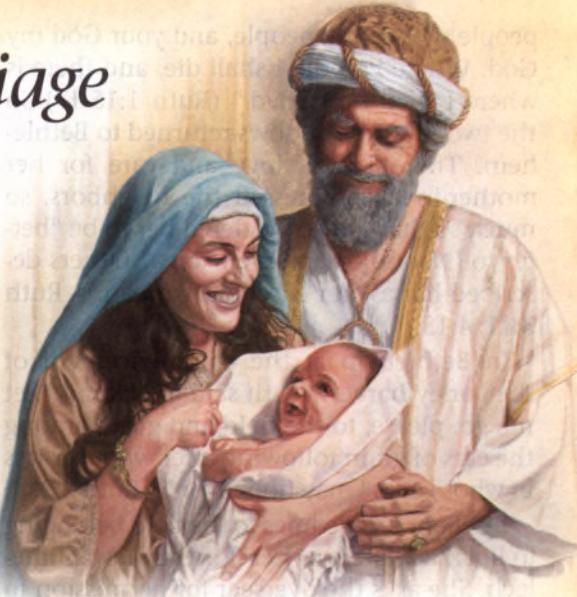
Boaz, a wealthy landowner, eats and drinks his fill and relaxes by a large heap of grain. Later, the harvest day comes to an end, and each man seeks a cozy place to rest. Boaz, satisfied, now covers himself and drifts off to sleep.

A Stealthy Encounter

At midnight, Boaz wakes up cold and trembling. Why, his feet have deliberately been uncovered, and someone is lying right there! Not recognizing who it is in the dark, he asks: "Who are you?" A woman's voice replies: "I am Ruth your slave girl, and you must spread out your skirt over your slave girl, for you are a repurchaser."—Ruth 3:1-9.

Alone in the dark they talk. Women are not found like this at a threshing floor. (Ruth 3:14) Nevertheless, at Boaz' bidding, Ruth keeps lying at his feet until just before dawn when she gets up and leaves, thus avoiding any unfounded criticism.

Was this a romantic rendezvous? Was this rich, older man cleverly seduced by Ruth—a poor, young widow from a pagan country? Or was Boaz taking advantage of Ruth's circumstances and loneliness that night? The



answer to those questions is all about loyalty and love of God. And the facts are also very touching.

But who is Ruth? What is her motive? And who is this rich man, Boaz?

"An Excellent Woman"

Years before this episode, famine struck Judah. An Israelite family of four—Elimelech; his wife, Naomi; and their two sons, Mahlon and Chilion—immigrated to the fertile land of Moab. The sons married two Moabitite women, Ruth and Orpah. Following the death of the three men in Moab, the three women heard that the conditions in Israel had improved. So Naomi—now widowed, embittered, without children or grandchildren—decided to return to her homeland.—Ruth 1:1-14.

On their way to Israel, Naomi convinced Orpah to return to her people. Naomi then told Ruth: "Look! Your widowed sister-in-law has returned to her people and her gods. Return with your widowed sister-in-law." But Ruth said: "Do not plead with me to abandon you, . . . for where you go I shall go . . . Your

people will be my people, and your God my God. Where you die I shall die, and there is where I shall be buried." (Ruth 1:15-17) So the two destitute widows returned to Bethlehem. There Ruth's love and care for her mother-in-law impressed the neighbors, so much so that they considered her to be "better to [Naomi] than seven sons." Others described her as "an excellent woman."—Ruth 3:11; 4:15.

In Bethlehem at the commencement of the barley harvest, Ruth said to Naomi: "Let me go, please, to the field and glean among the ears of grain following after whoever it is in whose eyes I may find favor."—Ruth 2:2.

By chance she comes to the field belonging to Boaz, a relative of her father-in-law, Elimelech. She asks the overseer for permission to glean. Her diligence in gleaning is outstanding, and the overseer commands her work to Boaz.—Ruth 1:22-2:7.

A Protector and Benefactor

Boaz is a devout worshiper of Jehovah. Each morning, Boaz greeted his harvesters with the words: "Jehovah be with you," and they replied: "Jehovah bless you." (Ruth 2:4) After observing Ruth's diligence at work and learning of her loyalty to Naomi, Boaz gives Ruth special gleaning status. In short, he tells her: "Stay in my fields; there is no need for you to go to others. Keep close to my young women; you will be safe with

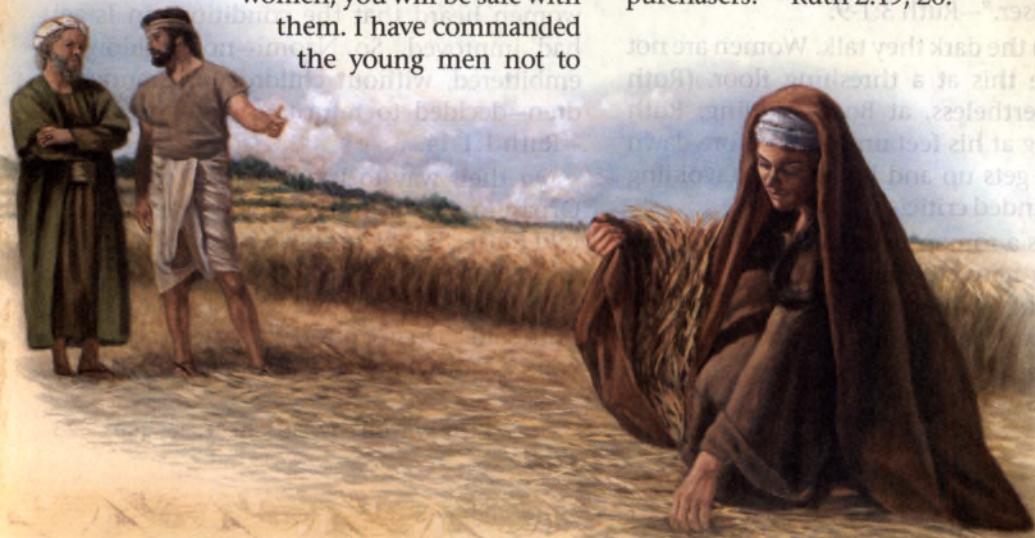
them. I have commanded the young men not to

touch you. When you are thirsty, they will draw fresh water for you."—Ruth 2:8, 9.

Ruth bows down to the earth and says: "How is it I have found favor in your eyes, when I am a foreigner?" Boaz answers: "I received a full report of all you have done for your mother-in-law after the death of your husband—how you left your father, mother, relatives, and your homeland to be among a people whom you have not formerly known. May Jehovah reward the way you act. May he give you a perfect wage."—Ruth 2:10-12.

Boaz is not trying to win her affections. The commendation he offers is sincere. Ruth is graciously humble, thanking him for his reassuring comfort. She considers it undeserved and continues working even harder. Later, at mealtime, Boaz calls Ruth: "Approach, eat some of the bread and dip your piece in the vinegar." She eats to satisfaction and saves food to take home for Naomi.—Ruth 2:14.

By day's end, Ruth has gleaned about 20 quarts of barley. She takes it and the leftover food back home to Naomi. (Ruth 2:15-18) Pleased with the abundance, Naomi asks: "Where did you glean today? . . . May the one who took notice of you become blessed." Learning it was Boaz, Naomi says: "Blessed be he of Jehovah, who has not left his loving-kindness toward the living and the dead. . . . The man is related to us. He is one of our repurchasers."—Ruth 2:19, 20.





Finding "a Resting-Place"

Desiring to find "a resting-place," or home, for her daughter-in-law, Naomi seizes the moment to

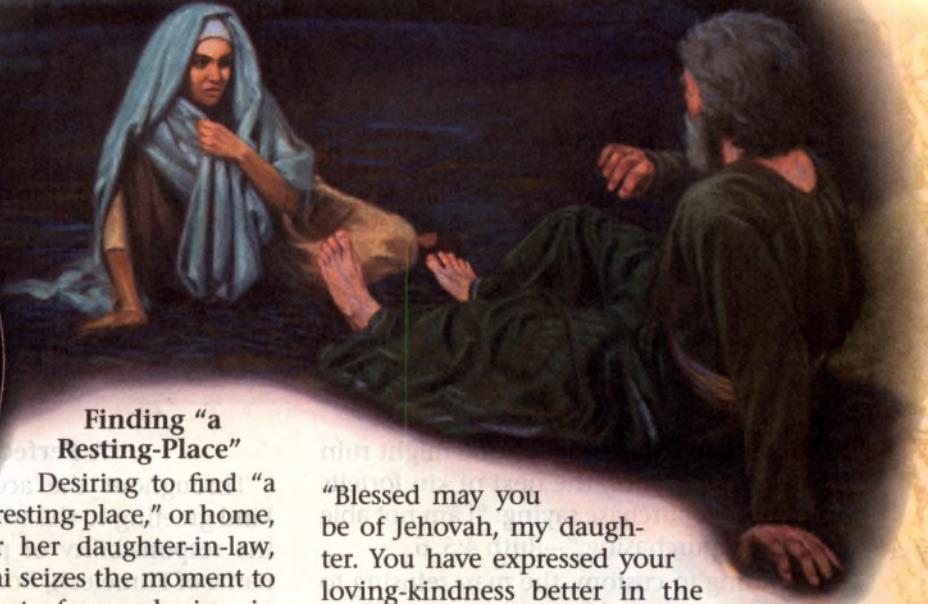
arrange for the request of repurchasing, in harmony with God's Law. (Leviticus 25:25; Deuteronomy 25:5, 6) Now Naomi coaches Ruth in a most effective, even somewhat dramatic, plan of action—a way of arresting the attention of Boaz. Prepared and well instructed, under the cover of darkness, Ruth goes down to the threshing floor that belongs to Boaz. She finds him asleep. She uncovers his feet and waits for him to wake up.—Ruth 3:1-7.

When Boaz does wake up, Ruth's symbolic action no doubt helps him to appreciate the significance of her request that he 'spread out his skirt over his slave girl.' Ruth's action makes the elderly Judean aware of his obligation as a repurchaser, since he was a kinsman of Ruth's late husband, Mahlon.—Ruth 3:9.

Ruth's night visit was not looked for. Yet, Boaz' reaction suggests that Ruth's claim for repurchasing was not wholly unexpected. Boaz was willing to act on Ruth's request.

Ruth's voice must have reflected some anxiety, prompting Boaz to reassure her: "Now, my daughter, do not be afraid. All that you say I shall do for you, for everyone in the gate of my people is aware that you are an excellent woman."—Ruth 3:11.

That Boaz viewed Ruth's actions as being completely virtuous is evident by his words:



"Blessed may you be of Jehovah, my daughter. You have expressed your loving-kindness better in the last instance than in the first instance." (Ruth 3:10) In the first instance, Ruth displayed loving-kindness, or loyal love, for Naomi. The last instance was that she unselfishly identified herself to Boaz, a much older man, because he was a repurchaser. She was willing to raise up offspring in the name of Mahlon, her deceased husband, and for Naomi.

A Repurchaser Retracts

The next morning, Boaz summons a kinsman, referred to as "So-and-so," who is more closely related to Naomi than is Boaz. In front of the inhabitants and the older men of the city, Boaz says: 'I thought that I should disclose to you your right to repurchase from Naomi the tract of land that belonged to her husband Elimelech, for she must sell it.' Boaz continues: 'Will you repurchase it? If not, then I will do the repurchasing.' At that So-and-so indicates that he will do the repurchasing.—Ruth 4:1-4.

But So-and-so is in for a surprise! Boaz now states before all the witnesses: "On the day that you buy the field from Naomi's hand, it is also from Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of the dead man, that you must buy it so as to cause the name of the dead man to rise upon

A Ray of Hope

If you ever feel that you are living in unhappy times, the story of Ruth can provide a spark of hope. It stands out as an important epilogue to the book of Judges. The book of Ruth tells how Jehovah used a

humble widow from the foreign nation of Moab in producing a king for his people. Against the backdrop of the book of Judges, Ruth's faith shines like a light of that era. From reading Ruth's story,

you can have assurance that no matter how terrible the times may be, God always cares for his people and carries out his purposes.

his inheritance." Fearing that he might ruin his own inheritance, the next of kin forfeits his right of repurchase saying: "I am not able to do the repurchasing."—Ruth 4:5, 6.

According to custom, the man refusing to repurchase had to draw his sandal off and give it to his fellow. So when the repurchaser says to Boaz, "Buy it for yourself," he proceeds to draw his sandal off. Then Boaz says to the older men and all the people: "You are witnesses today that I do buy all that belonged to Elimelech and all that belonged to Chilion and Mahlon from the hand of Naomi. And also Ruth the Moabitess, the wife of Mahlon, I do buy for myself as a wife to cause the name of the dead man to rise upon his inheritance . . . You are witnesses today."—Ruth 4:7-10.

All the people who were in the gate say to Boaz: "May Jehovah grant the wife who is coming into your house to be like Rachel and like Leah, both of whom built the house of Israel; and you prove your worth in Ephrathah and make a notable name in Bethlehem."—Ruth 4:11, 12.

With the blessing of the people, Boaz takes Ruth as his wife. She bears him a son named Obed, and thus Ruth and Boaz became ancestors of King David and consequently of Jesus Christ.—Ruth 4:13-17; Matthew 1:5, 6, 16.

"A Perfect Wage"

Throughout the account, from his first kind greeting to the workers to his accepting the responsibility of preserving the family name of Elimelech, Boaz proves to be an outstanding man—a man of action and authority. At the same time, he was a man of self-control, faith, and integrity. Boaz was also generous, kind, morally chaste, and fully obedient to Jehovah's commandments.

Ruth stands out for her love for Jehovah, for her loyal love toward Naomi, and for her industriousness and humility. It is no wonder that people viewed her as "an excellent woman." She did not eat "the bread of laziness," and because of her hard work, she had something to share with her needy mother-in-law. (Proverbs 31:27, 31) In assuming responsibility for Naomi, Ruth must have felt the happiness that results from giving.—Acts 20:35; 1 Timothy 5:4, 8.

What fine examples we

find in the book of Ruth!

Naomi is remembered by Jehovah. Ruth receives "a perfect wage" as an ancestress of Jesus Christ. Boaz is blessed with "an excellent woman." As for us, in such individuals we find examples of faith.

Do You Remember?

Have you appreciated reading the recent issues of *The Watchtower*? Well, see if you can answer the following questions:

• **How can we benefit from learning about the family of Shaphan?**

Shaphan was a copyist and secretary for King Josiah of Judah. An influential man in the kingdom, Shaphan supported the king's campaign to restore true worship. Two of Shaphan's sons stood by the prophet Jeremiah. And another son and two grandsons likewise used their influence in behalf of true worship. Similarly, we should use our resources and influence to uphold true worship.—12/15, pages 19-22.

• **How has Irene Hochstenbach overcome a major handicap and been able to serve Jehovah?**

When she was seven years old, she lost her hearing. Despite being deaf, she has learned to communicate with others and now travels with her husband (a traveling overseer) as he serves congregations in the Netherlands.—1/1, pages 23-6.

• **What two new study aids were released at the "Zealous Kingdom Proclaimers" District Conventions?**

Christians around the globe rejoiced to receive *Worship the Only True God*, which is designed to be studied with new ones after they have completed their study of the book *Knowledge That Leads to Everlasting Life*; the other new book is *Draw Close to Jehovah*, which focuses on Jehovah's qualities and dealings. It also shows how we can imitate him in displaying his qualities.—1/15, pages 23-4.

• **What is the sense of Proverbs 12:5: "The thoughts of the righteous ones are judgment"?**

The very thoughts of good people are morally sound and directed toward what is fair and just. Since righteous ones are motivated by love for God and for fellow humans, their intentions are good.—1/15, page 30.

• **What can help a person to cultivate a balanced view of work?**

It is useful to be trained from childhood to esteem work. The Bible urges us to have a good work ethic, avoiding laziness. (Proverbs 20:4) It also encourages Christians not to become preoccupied with work. We should recognize that service to God deserves a prominent place in our life. (1 Corinthians 7:29-31) Furthermore, true Christians are confident that God will not forsake them.—2/1, pages 4-6.

• **Where is an altar first mentioned in the Bible?**

It is at Genesis 8:20, referring to the altar that Noah built when he left the ark after the Deluge. Likely, however, Cain and Abel used altars in making their offerings. (Genesis 4:3, 4)—2/15, page 28.

• **How can some Christians make good use of changed circumstances?**

Some have accepted—or initiated—changes in their employment that have allowed them more time for the ministry. Others have increased their time and privileges in God's service when their family responsibilities decreased, such as when their children became adults and married.—3/1, pages 19-22.

• **How do the examples of Jonah and the apostle Peter help us to see others as Jehovah sees them?**

Both Jonah and Peter had well-known faults in their thinking and in how they responded to tests of faith and obedience. Still, Jehovah clearly saw good qualities in them and continued to use them in his service. When others offend or disappoint us, we can focus on their good qualities that we may have found attractive in the past and on the good that God sees in them.—3/15, pages 16-19.

• **Why do Bible translations differ in numbering the book of Psalms?**

There is a difference in numbering between the book in the original Hebrew language and in its translation into Greek in the *Septuagint*. More recent translations may differ, depending on whether they were based on the Hebrew text or on the *Septuagint*.—4/1, page 31.

IN OUR NEXT ISSUE

What Would You Like to Ask God?

Where Can True Comfort Be Found?

Does Jehovah Notice What You Do?



JEHOVAH CARES FOR Ordinary People

DO WE have to be extraordinary or outstanding in some way to be noticed by God? Abraham Lincoln, the 16th president of the United States, is quoted as having said: "The Lord prefers common-looking people. That is why he makes so many of them." Many feel that they are ordinary people who have nothing special to offer. Being ordinary may have the connotation of being "poor, inferior." Similarly, the word "common" may indicate "a lack of privilege or special status," "falling below ordinary standards," or even "second-rate." What kind of people do you prefer to be around? Arrogant, assertive, proud individuals? Would you not rather be around friendly, humble, unpretentious people who show a sincere, warm interest in others?

Since emotional bullying and ridicule are common in the world today, some find it difficult to believe that God is personally interested in them. "I came from a family that showed little love. I was belittled, teased, and laughed at. So, early in life I felt worthless," wrote a reader of this magazine. "I still carry entrenched feelings from my past that beat me down when I experience calamity." Yet, there are reasons to believe that God is personally interested in ordinary people.

God's Interest in Common People

"Jehovah is great and very much to be praised, and his greatness is unsearchable," wrote King David. (Psalm 145:3) However,

this does not prevent Jehovah from caring for us in a loving and compassionate way. (1 Peter 5:7) For example, the psalmist stated: "Jehovah is near to those that are broken at heart; and those who are crushed in spirit he saves."—Psalm 34:18.

Things that attract attention in the world, such as physical beauty, prestige, or wealth, are not what God considers important. God's Law to Israel showed his compassionate interest in poor people, orphans, widows, and foreigners. God told the Israelites, who had themselves been treated cruelly in Egypt: "You must not maltreat an alien resident or oppress him . . . You people must not afflict any widow or fatherless boy. If you should afflict him at all, then if he cries out to me at all, I shall unfailingly hear his outcry." (Exodus 22:21-24) Moreover, the prophet Isaiah expressed his confidence in God's care for the lowly: "You have become a stronghold to the lowly one, a stronghold to the poor one in the distress that he has, a refuge from the rainstorm, a shade from the heat, when the blast of the tyrannical ones is like a rainstorm against a wall."—Isaiah 25:4.

Throughout his ministry, Jesus Christ, who is "the exact representation" of God, became an example to his disciples in showing genuine interest in common people. (Hebrews 1:3) On seeing the crowds who "were skinned and thrown about like sheep without a shepherd," Jesus "felt pity for them."—Matthew 9:36.

Notice also what kind of people Jesus chose as his apostles—men who were described as “unlettered and ordinary.” (Acts 4:13) After the death of Jesus, his followers began to invite all sorts of people to listen to God’s Word. The apostle Paul wrote that “any unbeliever or ordinary person” could come into the Christian congregation and become a believer. (1 Corinthians 14:24, 25) Rather than choosing just those admired according to worldly standards, God selected many plain, ordinary people for his service. “You behold his calling of you, brothers,” said the apostle Paul, “that not many wise in a fleshly way were called, not many powerful, not many of noble birth; but God chose the foolish things of the world, that he might put the wise men to shame; and God chose the weak things of the world, that he might put the strong things to shame; and God chose the ignoble things of the world and the things looked down upon, the things that are not, that he might bring to nothing the things that are, in order that no flesh might boast in the sight of God.”—1 Corinthians 1:26-29.

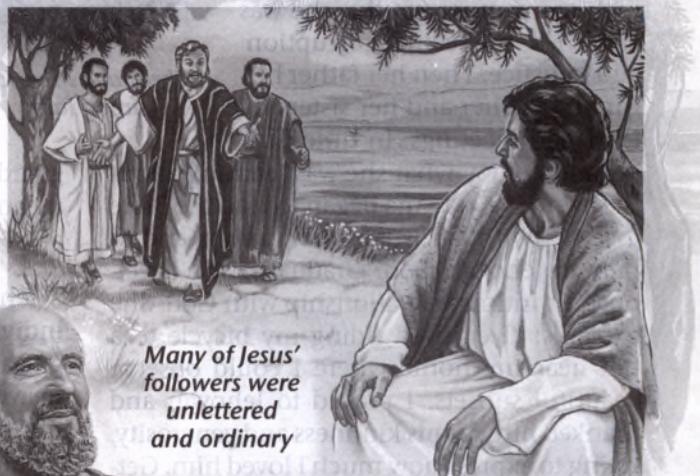
Today, God is likewise sincerely interested in us. God’s will is that “all sorts of men should be saved and come to an accurate knowledge of truth.” (1 Timothy 2:4) If God loved mankind so much that he sent his Son to earth to die for us, we have no reason to feel that we are unloved or worthless. (John 3:16) Jesus Christ showed his followers the importance of treating even the most insignificant one of his spiritual brothers as if dealing with Jesus personally. He said: “To the extent that you did it to one of the least of these my brothers, you did it to me.” (Matthew 25:40)

Regardless of how the world may view us, if we love the truth, we are special in God’s eyes.

That is how Francisco,* a fatherless Brazilian boy, felt after developing a personal relationship with God. He explains: “Knowing Jehovah and his organization helped me to cope with my feelings of insecurity and timidity. I learned that Jehovah is personally interested in each one of us.” To Francisco, Jehovah became a real Father.

Concern for Young People

Jehovah takes a genuine interest in young people not only as a group but as individuals.



Many of Jesus' followers were unlettered and ordinary

Of course, young or old, we never want to think too highly of ourselves. Yet, we may have talents and qualities that God can use in the future. Jehovah knows what refinement and training we need to make full use of our potential. For example, notice the account in 1 Samuel chapter 16. Since other prospective candidates for Israel’s kingship seemed more qualified to the prophet Samuel, Jehovah explained His reasons for choosing David, the youngest son of Jesse, as the future king of

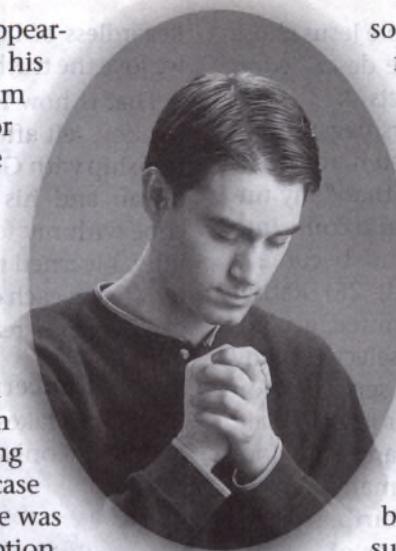
* Some names have been changed.

Israel: "Do not look at his appearance and at the height of his stature, for I have rejected him [David's older brother]. For not the way man sees is the way God sees, because mere man sees what appears to the eyes; but as for Jehovah, he sees what the heart is."

—1 Samuel 16:7.

Can young people today be confident that Jehovah shows genuine interest in them? Consider Ana, a young Brazilian woman. As is the case with many other youths, she was disturbed by seeing corruption and injustice. Then her father began to take her and her sisters to Christian meetings. In time, she began to enjoy what she was learning about the Word of God. Ana began to read the Bible together with Christian publications and to pray to Jehovah God. Gradually, she developed an intimate relationship with God. She explains: "I enjoyed riding my bicycle to a hill near my home where I could observe beautiful sunsets. I prayed to Jehovah and thanked him for his kindness and generosity, trying to express how much I loved him. Getting to know Jehovah God and his purposes gave me tranquillity and a feeling of security." Do you too try to find time to ponder over Jehovah's loving care?

Admittedly, our background may stand in the way of our enjoying an intimate relationship with Jehovah. Take for example Lidia. When she opened up to her father about a matter of deep personal concern, he simply brushed her off, saying: "Nonsense." Although understanding that her father wanted her to forget the problem, Lidia says: "Studying the Bible gave me everything that I desired and much more. The attractive per-



Christians strive for strong faith

sonality of Jehovah made him my best friend. Now I have a loving, understanding Father to whom I can pour out my feelings and my most intimate fears. I can spend hours talking with the most important Person in the universe, certain that he will listen to me." Such Bible texts as Philippians 4:6, 7 helped her to feel Jehovah's loving care. That passage says: "Do not be anxious over anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication along with thanksgiving let your petitions be made known to God; and the peace of God that excels all thought will guard your hearts and your mental powers by means of Christ Jesus."

Help to Care for Your Needs

Jehovah shows his concern for his servants individually as well as for his worldwide congregation. We can show our love for our heavenly Father by taking time to talk to him. We should never take for granted our relationship with him. David was constantly aware of his relationship with Jehovah. He said: "Make me know your own ways, O Jehovah; teach me your own paths. Make me walk in your truth and teach me, for you are my God of salvation. In you I have hoped all day long."—Psalm 25:4, 5.

The idea of having an intimate relationship with God may be new to you. Whatever problems you may have, you can always be confident that the Most High will be able to help you, in harmony with his will. (1 John 5:14, 15) Hence, learn to make your prayers specific, taking into consideration your circumstances and needs.

The importance of recognizing our needs is highlighted in the prayer that King Solomon offered when the temple was inaugurated: "In case a famine occurs in the land, in case a pestilence occurs, in case scorching and mildew, locusts and cockroaches occur; in case their enemies besiege them in the land of their gates—any sort of plague and any sort of malady—whatever prayer, whatever request for favor there may occur on the part of any man or of all your people Israel, because they know each one his own plague and his own pain . . . Then may you yourself hear from the heavens, . . . and you must forgive and give to each one according to all his ways." (2 Chronicles 6:28-30) Indeed, only you yourself 'know your own plague and your own pain.' How vital, then, it is to acknowledge your real needs and desires. If you do, "[Jehovah] will give you the requests of your heart."—Psalm 37:4.

Strengthen Your Relationship With Jehovah

Jehovah is pleased to let ordinary people enjoy an intimate relationship with him. His Word assures us: "I shall be a father to you, and you will be sons and daughters to me,' says Jehovah the Almighty." (2 Corinthians 6:18) Really, Jehovah and his Son want us to succeed and gain everlasting life. How encouraging it is to know that Jehovah will help us in caring



We do not have to be prominent to enjoy God's favor

for our responsibilities in the family, at work, and in the Christian congregation!

Still, we all face critical times. Poor health, family problems, low income, or something else may cause us pain. We may not know how to deal with a test or a trial. The increased pressures are, directly or indirectly, caused by the wicked accuser, Satan the Devil, who is waging a spiritual war against God's people. However, there is someone who understands us and helps us to maintain a good relationship with Jehovah. He is no other than Jesus Christ in his elevated position in the heavens. We read: "We have as high priest, not one who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who has been tested in all respects like ourselves, but without sin. Let us, therefore, approach with freeness of speech to the throne of undeserved kindness, that we may obtain mercy and find undeserved kindness for help at the right time."—Hebrews 4:15, 16.

How reassuring to know that we do not have to be famous or wealthy to enjoy God's favor! Even when in sore straits, be like the psalmist who prayed: "I am afflicted and poor. Jehovah himself takes account of me. You are my assistance and the Provider of escape for me." (Psalm 31:9-14; 40:17) Be assured that Jehovah loves humble, ordinary people. Really, 'we can throw all our anxiety upon him because he cares for us.'—1 Peter 5:7.



How Important Is Loving-Kindness?

"THE desirable thing in earthling man is his loving-kindness," states the Bible. (Proverbs 19:22) Indeed, acts of kindness motivated by love are truly desirable. The word "loving-kindness" in the Bible, however, refers to a kindness that may be based on an already existing relationship, such as one founded on a prior act of kindness on the part of another. Thus, it includes the thought of loyalty.

King Jehoash of Judah failed to develop this desirable quality. He owed a great debt of gratitude to his aunt and to Jehoiada, his uncle. When Jehoash was less than one year old, his wicked grandmother made herself queen and killed all of Jehoash's brothers, who were heirs to the throne. She failed to kill little Jehoash, though, because his aunt and uncle had carefully hidden him. They also taught him God's Law. When Jehoash was seven, his uncle used his authority as high priest to execute the wicked queen and to enthrone Jehoash.—2 Chronicles 22:10–23:15.

Young Jehoash ruled as king in a fine manner until the death of his uncle, but then he turned to idol worship. God sent Zechariah, who was the son of Jehoiada, to warn Jehoash of his apostasy. Jehoash had Zechariah stoned. What a shocking act of disloyalty toward a family to whom he owed so much!—2 Chronicles 24:17–21.

The Bible states: "Jehoash the king did not remember the loving-kindness that [Zechariah's] father had exercised toward him, so that he killed his son." At the point of dying, Zechariah said: "Let Jehovah see to it and ask it back." True to Zechariah's words, Jehoash became a very sick man and was murdered by his own servants.—2 Chronicles 24:17–25.

Instead of ending up like King Jehoash, all who follow this advice will have a blessed future: "May loving-kindness and trueness themselves not leave you. . . . And so find favor . . . in the eyes of God and of earthling man."—Proverbs 3:3, 4.

