

JUNE 2023

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:  
AUGUST 14–SEPTEMBER 10, 2023

**SONG 124**

Ever Loyal

**PREVIEW**

Gideon was appointed by Jehovah to shepherd and to protect His people during a very difficult period in the history of the nation of Israel. Gideon faithfully carried out that assignment for some 40 years. However, he faced a number of challenges. We will discuss how his example can help elders today when they face tests.

## Elders—Learn From Gideon’s Example

*“Time will fail me if I go on to relate about Gideon.”*

—HEB. 11:32.

CHRISTIAN elders have been entrusted with the care of Jehovah’s precious sheep. These devoted men treasure their privilege to serve their brothers and sisters, and they work hard to be “shepherds who . . . really shepherd.” (Jer. 23:4; **read 1 Peter 5:2.**) How thankful we are to have such men in our congregations!

<sup>2</sup> In caring for their responsibilities, elders face many challenges. For one thing, caring for a congregation involves a great deal of work. Tony, an elder in the United States, had to learn to be more modest when it came to the amount of work he accepted. He explains: “At the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, I took on more and more work to organize meetings and the ministry. But no matter how much I did, there was always more to do. Eventually, my Bible reading, personal study, and prayer started to slip.” Ilir, an elder in Kosovo, faced a different challenge. When he was in a war zone, he found it difficult to obey theocratic direction. He says: “My courage was tested when the branch office offered me an assignment to help the brothers and sisters in a dangerous area. I was afraid, and the direction did not seem practical.” Tim, a missionary in Asia, found it hard just to keep up with the pace day after day. He says: “At times, I felt mentally and emotionally exhausted.” What can help elders who are facing similar challenges?

1. According to 1 Peter 5:2, what privilege do elders enjoy?
2. What tests may some elders face?



Following Gideon's example, a modest elder is willing to ask for help, such as in caring for cart witnessing (See paragraph 6)

<sup>3</sup> Elders can learn from the example of Judge Gideon. (Heb. 6:12; 11:32) He was both a protector and a shepherd of God's people. (Judg. 2:16; 1 Chron. 17:6) Like Gideon, elders have been appointed to care for God's people during a very turbulent time. (Acts 20:28; 2 Tim. 3:1) We can learn from Gideon's modesty, humility, and obedience. His endurance was tested as he carried out his assignments. Whether we serve as an elder or not, we can grow in appreciation for our elders. We can support these hardworking spiritual men.—Heb. 13:17.

#### WHEN YOUR MODESTY AND HUMILITY ARE TESTED

<sup>4</sup> Gideon was a modest and humble man.\* When Jehovah's angel told Gideon that he had been chosen to deliver Israel from the powerful Midianites,

\* Modesty and humility are closely linked traits. We show that we are modest by having a proper view of ourselves and of our limitations. We show that we are humble by displaying lowliness of mind. (Phil. 2:3) Generally, a modest person is also a humble person.

3. How can all benefit from considering the example of Judge Gideon?
4. How did Gideon show modesty and humility?

that humble man replied: "My clan is the least in Manasseh, and I am the most insignificant in my father's house." (Judg. 6:15) He felt unqualified for the assignment, but Jehovah knew better. With Jehovah's help, Gideon completed his assignment successfully.

<sup>5</sup> Elders do their best to display modesty and humility in all things. (Mic. 6:8; Acts 20:18, 19) They do not exaggerate their abilities or accomplishments; nor do they beat themselves up for their flaws or failings. Nevertheless, an elder may face tests. For example, he may accept a number of assignments and then find it difficult to fulfill them all. Or he may be criticized for the way he handled one assignment or praised for the way he handled another assignment. What can elders learn from Gideon that will help them in such situations?

<sup>6</sup> **Ask for help.** A person who is modest is aware of his personal limitations.

5. How may an elder's modesty and humility be tested?
6. What can elders learn about modesty from Gideon? (See also picture.)

Gideon was modest in being willing to ask others for help. (Judg. 6:27, 35; 7:24) Wise elders do similarly. Tony, quoted earlier, explains: “Because of my up-bringing, I tended to accept more work than I could reasonably handle. So I decided to include the topic of modesty in our family worship and get my wife’s observations. I also reviewed on jw.org the video *Train, Trust, and Empower Others, as Jesus Does.*” Tony began to invite others to help with his workload. The result? Tony says: “The work in the congregation is being cared for, and I have more time to build myself up spiritually.”

<sup>7</sup> **Respond mildly if criticized.** Another test for elders comes if they are criticized. Again, Gideon’s example can help. No doubt aware of his own imperfections, he responded mildly when the Ephraimites criticized him. (Judg. 8:1-3) Gideon did not reply in anger. He showed lowliness of mind by listening to their concerns, and he tactfully defused the tense situation. Wise elders imitate Gideon by listening carefully and responding mildly if criticized. **(Read James 3:13.)** They thus contribute to the peace in the congregation.

<sup>8</sup> **Direct praise to Jehovah.** When Gideon was honored for the victory over Midian, he focused the attention on Jehovah. (Judg. 8:22, 23) How might appointed men imitate Gideon? They can credit Jehovah for what they accom-

plish. (1 Cor. 4:6, 7) For example, if an elder is commended for his teaching ability, he can direct attention to the source of the instruction, God’s Word, or to the training we receive from Jehovah’s organization. Elders might at times reflect on whether they are drawing undue attention to themselves. Consider the experience of an elder named Timothy. When newly appointed, Timothy loved giving public talks. He says: “I would come up with elaborate introductions and illustrations. These often drew praise from others. Unfortunately, the attention tended to be on me instead of on the Bible or Jehovah.” In time, Timothy saw the need to adjust his teaching style in order to avoid drawing undue attention to himself. (Prov. 27:21) With what result? He explains: “Different ones tell me how my talk has helped them to cope with a problem, to endure a trial, or to draw closer to Jehovah. I get more joy from those comments than I ever did from the praise that was directed to me years ago.”

#### WHEN YOUR OBEDIENCE OR COURAGE IS TESTED

<sup>9</sup> After Gideon was appointed as judge, his obedience and courage were tested. He was given the dangerous assignment to destroy his father’s Baal altar. (Judg. 6:25, 26) Later, after gathering an army, Gideon was twice directed to reduce its size. (Judg. 7:2-7) Finally, he was told to attack the enemy camp in the dead of night.—Judg. 7:9-11.

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7. If criticized, how can elders imitate Gideon? (James 3:13)

8. How should appointed men respond if they receive praise? Give an example.

9. How were Gideon’s obedience and courage tested? (See cover picture.)



<sup>10</sup> Elders should be “ready to obey.” (Jas. 3:17) An obedient elder readily submits to what the Scriptures say and to direction from God’s organization. He thus sets a good example for others. Still, his obedience may be tested. He may, for instance, find it hard to keep up with the direction he receives. In some cases, he may wonder whether certain direction is really practical or wise. Or he may be asked to take on an assignment that could put his freedom at risk. How can elders imitate Gideon’s obedience in such situations?

<sup>11</sup> ***Listen carefully to direction and apply it.*** God told Gideon how to destroy his father’s altar, where to build a new altar to Jehovah, and which animal to sacrifice. Gideon did not try to second-guess the direction—he just followed it. Today, elders receive instructions from Jehovah’s organization by means of letters, announcements, and guidelines related to our spiritual and physical welfare. We love our elders for faithfully following theocratic direction. The whole congregation benefits.—Ps. 119:112.

<sup>12</sup> ***Be willing to adjust.*** Recall that at Jehovah’s request, Gideon reduced his army by more than 99 percent. (Judg. 7:8) He may have thought: ‘Is this change really necessary? Will this work?’ Nevertheless, Gideon obeyed. Elders today imitate Gideon by implementing recommended changes in theo-



Even where our work is under ban, we can courageously give an effective witness

(See paragraph 13)

cratic direction. **(Read Hebrews 13:17.)**

As an example, in 2014 the Governing Body changed the way Kingdom Hall and Assembly Hall construction projects are financed. (2 Cor. 8:12-14) Congregations would no longer repay a loan. Instead, congregations worldwide would pool their resources so that theocratic facilities could be constructed wherever they were needed, regardless of the local congregation’s ability to pay. When José learned of the change, he doubted that it would work, thinking: ‘Not even one Kingdom Hall will ever be built. This is not how things are done in this part of the world.’ What helped José to support the direction? He says: “The words of Proverbs 3:5, 6 reminded me to trust in Jehovah. And the results have been wonderful! Not only are we building more Kingdom Halls but we have learned to contribute in different ways so that an equalizing takes place.”

10. How may an elder’s obedience be tested?

11. What can help elders to be obedient?

12. How can elders apply Hebrews 13:17 if there is a change in theocratic direction?

**<sup>13</sup> *Courageously do Jehovah’s will.*** Gideon obeyed Jehovah despite his fears and the risk involved. (Judg. 9:17) After receiving assurance from Jehovah, Gideon was absolutely convinced that God would support him as he protected God’s people. Elders living in areas where the work is under ban imitate Gideon. They courageously take the lead at the meetings and in the ministry despite the threat of arrest, interrogation, loss of employment, or violence.\* During the great tribulation, elders will need courage to obey instructions they will receive—regardless of the dangers involved. The instructions may relate to delivering a symbolic hailstone message and to surviving the attack of Gog of Magog.—Ezek. 38:18; Rev. 16:21.

\* See the article “Keep Worshipping Jehovah When Under Ban” in the July 2019, issue of *The Watchtower*, pp. 10-11, pars. 10-13.

13. (a) Of what was Gideon convinced? (b) How can elders imitate Gideon? (See also picture.)

## WHEN YOUR ENDURANCE IS TESTED

**<sup>14</sup>** Gideon’s assignment as judge involved a lot of physical exertion. When the Midianites fled during the nighttime battle, Gideon chased after them from the Valley of Jezreel all the way to the Jordan River, which possibly was surrounded by thickets. (Judg. 7:22) Did Gideon stop at the Jordan? No! Though tired, he and his 300 men crossed over and continued the pursuit. Finally, they caught up with the Midianites and defeated them.—Judg. 8:4-12.

**<sup>15</sup>** An elder may at times feel physically, mentally, or emotionally drained from taking care of the congregation and his family. In such circumstances, how can elders imitate Gideon?

**<sup>16</sup> *Trust that Jehovah will strengthen***

14. How was Gideon’s endurance tested?

15. When may an elder’s endurance be tested?

16-17. What helped Gideon to endure, and what confidence can elders have? (Isaiah 40:28-31) (See also picture.)

Loving elders have been able to strengthen many who need support

(See paragraphs 16-17)



**you.** Gideon trusted that Jehovah would give him strength, and he was not disappointed. (Judg. 6:14, 34) Once, Gideon and his men were pursuing two Midianite kings on foot while the kings may have been riding camels. (Judg. 8:12, 21) Yet, with God's help, the determined Israelites prevailed. Elders can likewise rely on Jehovah, the one who "never tires out or grows weary." He will give them strength when they need it.—**Read Isaiah 40:28-31.**

<sup>17</sup> Consider the experience of Matthew, a member of a Hospital Liaison Committee. What helps him to endure? Matthew says: "I have experienced the reality of Philippians 4:13. Many times when tired and completely spent, I have prayed intensely, begging God for the physical and mental energy that I need to support my brothers. In those moments, I have felt Jehovah's spirit energize me, helping me to endure." Like Gideon, our devoted elders may face

obstacles while unselfishly shepherding the flock. Granted, they need to recognize their physical and emotional limits and work within those limits. They can, though, trust that Jehovah will hear their requests for help and will strengthen them to endure.—Ps. 116:1; Phil. 2:13.

<sup>18</sup> There are timely and practical lessons that elders can learn from Gideon. Elders ought to display modesty and humility in both the amount of work they take on and the way they respond to criticism or praise. They must display obedience and courage, especially as the end of this system of things draws near. And they need to trust that no matter what obstacles they may face, God can strengthen them. Certainly, we appreciate such hardworking shepherds and "keep holding men of that sort dear." —Phil. 2:29.

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18. In review, how can elders imitate Gideon?

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## HOW CAN ELDERS IMITATE GIDEON'S . . .

- modesty and humility?      ■ obedience and courage?      ■ endurance?

## SONG 143

Keep Working, Watching,  
and Waiting

## PREVIEW

In 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, we find a series of illustrations and comparisons that teach us about a future day of Jehovah. What is that “day,” and how will it arrive? Who will survive it? Who will not survive? How can we prepare for it? We will examine the apostle Paul’s words and answer those questions.

## Keep Ready for Jehovah’s Day

*“Jehovah’s day is coming exactly as a thief in the night.”*

—1 THESS. 5:2.

WHEN the Bible speaks of “Jehovah’s day,” it refers to the time when Jehovah judges his enemies and brings salvation to his people. In the past, Jehovah at times carried out judgments. (Isa. 13:1, 6; Ezek. 13:5; Zeph. 1:8) In our time, “Jehovah’s day” begins with the attack on Babylon the Great and culminates in the battle of Armageddon. To survive that “day,” we need to prepare now. Jesus taught that we must not only *get* ready for the “great tribulation” but also *“keep ready”* for it.—Matt. 24:21; Luke 12:40.

<sup>2</sup> In his first inspired letter to the Thessalonians, the apostle Paul used a number of illustrations to help Christians keep ready for Jehovah’s great day of judgment. Paul knew that Jehovah’s day would not come right then. (2 Thess. 2:1-3) Still, he urged his brothers to prepare for that day as if it were coming tomorrow, and we too can apply his counsel. Let us consider his explanation about the following: (1) how Jehovah’s day would arrive, (2) who would not survive that day, and (3) how we can prepare to survive.

### HOW WILL JEHOVAH’S DAY ARRIVE?

<sup>3</sup> *“As a thief in the night.”* (1 Thess. 5:2) This is the first of three word pictures used to describe the arrival of Je-

1. What must we do to survive Jehovah’s day?
2. Why can we benefit from 1 Thessalonians?
3. How does Jehovah’s day come as a thief in the night? (See also picture.)



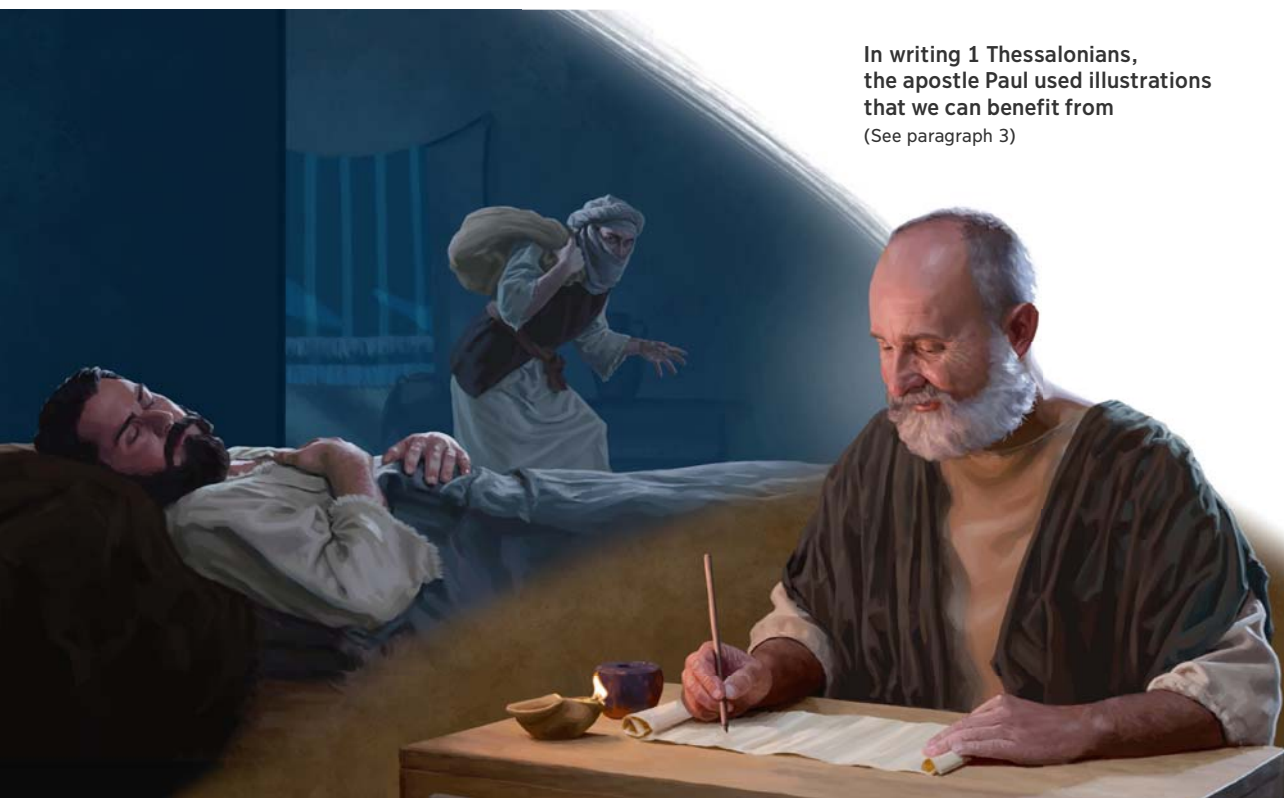
hovah's day. Thieves often act quickly and under the cover of darkness to catch their victims off guard. Jehovah's day will also strike suddenly, taking most people by surprise. Even true Christians might be surprised by how quickly events unfold. But unlike the wicked, we will not suffer destruction.

<sup>4</sup> ***“Like birth pains on a pregnant woman.”*** (1 Thess. 5:3) An expectant mother cannot predict the exact time when she will go into labor. She has no doubt, though, that it will occur. When it does, the labor will likely be sudden, painful, and unstoppable. Similarly, we do not know the day and hour when Jehovah's day will begin. Still, we are certain that it is coming and that God's judgment on the wicked will be sudden and inescapable.

4. In what way is Jehovah's day like birth pains?

<sup>5</sup> ***Like the dawn.*** Paul's third illustration again mentions thieves stealing at night. But Paul shifts his viewpoint and seems to compare Jehovah's day to the dawn. (1 Thess. 5:4) Burglars who come at night could be so preoccupied that they lose track of time. The light of a new day might catch them off guard and expose them. The great tribulation will likewise expose those who, like thieves, remain in darkness by persisting in works that displease God. Unlike them, we can be ready by rejecting behavior that displeases Jehovah and pursuing “every sort of goodness and righteousness and truth.” (Eph. 5:8-12) Paul next uses two related illustrations to describe those who will not survive.

5. In what way is the great tribulation like the dawn?



In writing 1 Thessalonians, the apostle Paul used illustrations that we can benefit from  
(See paragraph 3)

## WHO WILL NOT SURVIVE JEHOVAH'S DAY?

<sup>6</sup> ***“Those who sleep.”*** (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:6, 7.) Paul compared those who will not survive Jehovah’s day to people who are asleep. They are unaware of their surroundings or the passing of time. Hence, they cannot discern important developments or respond to them. Most people today are asleep in a spiritual sense. (Rom. 11:8) They are indifferent to evidence that we are living in “the last days” and that the great tribulation will come soon. Major world events may rouse some from spiritual slumber and move them to show a little interest in our Kingdom message. Yet, many go back to sleep rather than stay awake. Even some who believe in a day of judgment think that it is far off. (2 Pet. 3:3, 4) However, we recognize that the inspired counsel to stay awake becomes more urgent with each passing day.

<sup>7</sup> ***“Those who get drunk.”*** The apostle likened those who face God’s wrath to drunkards. People under the influence of alcohol are slow to respond to what is happening around them, and they make poor decisions. Similarly, the wicked do not respond to God’s warnings. They choose a course that leads to their destruction. But Christians are told to keep their senses, to be sober. (1 Thess. 5:6) One Bible scholar describes this soberness as “a calm, steady state of mind which weighs and esti-

mates things aright and thus enables us to make the right decision.” Why must we keep calm and steady? So that we do not get caught up in today’s political or social issues. The pressure to take sides in these matters will increase as Jehovah’s day draws closer. Still, we need not be anxious about how we will respond. God’s spirit can help us to have a calm and steady state of mind and to make wise decisions.—Luke 12:11, 12.

## WHAT CAN WE DO TO PREPARE FOR JEHOVAH'S DAY?

<sup>8</sup> ***“Put on the breastplate . . . and the . . . helmet.”*** Paul compares us to soldiers who are alert and dressed for battle. (Read 1 Thessalonians 5:8.) A soldier on active duty is expected to be prepared for battle at all times. It is similar with us. We remain ready for Jehovah’s day by wearing a breastplate of faith and love and a helmet of hope. These qualities can help us greatly.

<sup>9</sup> A breastplate protected a soldier’s heart. Faith and love protect our figurative heart. They will help us to keep serving God and following Jesus. Faith assures us that Jehovah will reward us for seeking him with all our heart. (Heb. 11:6) It will move us to remain loyal to our Leader, Jesus, even if we have to endure hardships. We can build the faith to face life’s challenges by noting modern-day examples of individuals who maintained integrity despite persecution or economic hardship. And we

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6. In what sense are most people asleep? (1 Thessalonians 5:6, 7)

7. How are those who are facing God’s wrath like drunk people?

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8. How does 1 Thessalonians 5:8 illustrate the qualities that will help us to stay awake and keep our senses? (See also picture.)

9. How does our faith protect us?



While many people continue unconcerned, we remain ready for Jehovah's day by wearing a breastplate of faith and love and a helmet of hope  
(See paragraphs 8, 12)

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can avoid the snare of materialism by imitating ones who simplified their life to put Kingdom interests first.\*

<sup>10</sup> Love is also essential to stay awake and keep our senses. (Matt. 22:37-39) Love for God helps us to endure in preaching despite any trouble this might bring on us. (2 Tim. 1:7, 8) Because our love extends to those who do not share our faith, we keep preaching and keep working our territory, even witnessing by telephone and by letter. We do not give up hope that one day our neighbors will change and begin to do what is right. —Ezek. 18:27, 28.

<sup>11</sup> Our love of neighbor includes fellow Christians. We show such love by “encouraging one another and building one

another up.” (**Read 1 Thessalonians 5: 11.**) Like soldiers serving side by side in combat, we encourage one another. Of course, a soldier might accidentally injure a fellow soldier in the heat of battle, but he would never do it deliberately. Comparably, we would never knowingly hurt our brothers and sisters or repay injury for injury. (1 Thess. 5:13, 15) We also show our love by respecting the brothers who are presiding over the congregation. (1 Thess. 5:12) When Paul wrote this letter, the Thessalonian congregation was less than a year old. Its appointed men were likely inexperienced and may have made mistakes. Still, they deserved respect. As the great tribulation approaches, we may need to depend on local elders for direction even more than we do now. We may lose contact with world headquarters and the branch office; hence, it is important to learn to love and respect our elders now. No matter what happens, let us keep our

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\* See the series “They Offered Themselves Willingly.”

10. How does love for God and for our neighbor help us to endure?

11. How does love for fellow believers help us? (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

senses, not focusing on their imperfections, but focusing on the fact that Jehovah through Christ is guiding these faithful men.

<sup>12</sup> Just as a helmet protected a soldier's head, our hope of salvation protects our thinking. With strong hope, we recognize that what this world offers is worthless. (Phil. 3:8) Our hope helps us to remain calm and steady. This was true of Wallace and Laurinda, who serve in Africa. Within three weeks, each lost a parent in death. Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, they were unable to return home to be with their families. Wallace wrote: "The resurrection hope helps me to think of them, not the way they were in their final days in this world, but the way they will be in their first days of the new world. This hope calms me when I struggle with sadness or feelings of loss."

12. How does our hope protect our thinking?

<sup>13</sup> ***"Do not put out the fire of the spirit."*** (1 Thess. 5:19) Paul compared holy spirit to a fire within us. When we have God's spirit, we are aglow with zeal and enthusiasm for what is right and we are energized to work for Jehovah. (Rom. 12:11) What can we do to receive holy spirit? We can pray for it, study God's inspired Word, and associate with his spirit-directed organization. Doing so will help us to cultivate "the fruitage of the spirit."—Gal. 5:22, 23.

<sup>14</sup> After God gives us his holy spirit, we must be careful that we "do not put out the fire of the spirit." God grants his spirit only to those who maintain clean thinking and clean conduct. He would not continue to give us his spirit if we were to harbor unclean thoughts and act on them. (1 Thess. 4:7, 8) To keep receiv-

13. What can we do to receive holy spirit?

14. What must we avoid if we are to continue receiving God's spirit? (See also picture.)

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Ask yourself, 'Do my actions show that I want to continue to receive God's spirit?'

(See paragraph 14)





ing holy spirit, we must also “not treat prophecies with contempt.” (1 Thess. 5:20) “Prophecies” here refer to messages produced by God’s spirit, including those concerning Jehovah’s day and the urgency of our times. We do not push that day off in our mind, thinking that Armageddon will not happen in our lifetime. Instead, we speed it up—keep it close in mind—by maintaining right conduct and keeping busy with “deeds of godly devotion” every day.—2 Pet. 3:11, 12.

#### “MAKE SURE OF ALL THINGS”

<sup>15</sup> In the near future, God’s opposers will in some sense declare: “Peace and security!” (1 Thess. 5:3) Demon-inspired propaganda will fill the earth, misleading most. (Rev. 16:13, 14) What about us? We will not be fooled if we “make sure of [or, “test”] all things.” (**Read 1 Thessalonians 5:21**; see study notes.) The Greek word rendered “make sure of” was used in connection with testing

15. How can we avoid being fooled by misinformation and demonic propaganda? (1 Thessalonians 5:21)

precious metals. Thus, we need to test what we hear or what we read to determine whether it is genuine. That was important for the Thessalonians, and it will be even more important for us as the great tribulation approaches. Instead of naively accepting what others say, we use our thinking ability to compare what we read or what we hear with what the Bible and Jehovah’s organization say. In doing so, we will not be fooled by any demonic propaganda or trickery.—Prov. 14:15; 1 Tim. 4:1.

<sup>16</sup> As a group, God’s servants will survive the great tribulation. Individually, though, we do not know what tomorrow will bring. (Jas. 4:14) Still, whether we live through the great tribulation or die before then, we will be rewarded with everlasting life if we remain faithful. The anointed will be with Christ in heaven. The other sheep will be on a paradise earth. May we all focus on our wonderful hope and keep ready for Jehovah’s day!

16. What sure hope do we have, and what are we moved to do?

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## HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- |                                  |                                       |  |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|
| ■ How will Jehovah’s day arrive? | ■ Who will not survive Jehovah’s day? | ■ What can we do to prepare for Jehovah’s day? |
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**SONG 8**

Jehovah Is Our Refuge

**PREVIEW**

As used in the Scriptures, the term “fear” is broad in meaning. Depending on the context, it can refer to terror, respect, or awe. This article will help us cultivate the type of fear that can motivate us to be courageous and loyal in our service to our heavenly Father.

## Why Should We Fear Jehovah?

*“Close friendship with Jehovah belongs to those who fear him.”—PS. 25:14.*

WHAT qualities, do you think, are essential if you want to maintain a close friendship with someone? You would likely answer that good friends should love and support each other. You probably would not think of fear as an important quality for a good friendship. However, as the theme text for this article states, those who want to have a close friendship with Jehovah must “fear him.”—**Read Psalm 25:14.**

<sup>2</sup> No matter how long we have been serving Jehovah, all of us need to maintain a healthy fear of him. But what does it mean to fear God? How can we learn to fear Jehovah? And what can we learn about the fear of God from the steward Obadiah, High Priest Jehoiada, and King Jehoash?

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN TO FEAR GOD?

<sup>3</sup> We may experience fear if we believe that we could suffer some kind of harm. This type of fear can be healthy and can move us to act wisely. Fear of falling holds us back from walking too close to the edge of a cliff. Fear of injury may impel us to run from a dangerous situation. Fear of damaging our friendship with someone

1-2. According to Psalm 25:14, what must we do if we want to have a close friendship with Jehovah?

3. Describe what causes us to experience fear and how we may be affected.

we love keeps us from saying or doing something unkind.

<sup>4</sup> Satan wants people to have an unhealthy fear of Jehovah. Satan promotes the idea expressed by Eliphaz—that Jehovah is a vengeful, angry God who is impossible to please. (Job 4:18, 19) Satan wants us to become so afraid of Jehovah that we stop serving Him. To avoid that trap, we need to develop a proper fear of God.

<sup>5</sup> A person who has a proper fear of God loves Him and does not want to do anything that would damage his relationship with Him. Jesus had such “godly fear.” (Heb. 5:7) He did not feel a morbid dread of Jehovah. (Isa. 11:2, 3) Instead, he felt a deep love for him and wanted to obey him. (John 14:21, 31) Like Jesus, we feel deep respect and awe for Jehovah because He is loving, wise, just, and powerful. We also know that Jehovah loves us very much and is affected by how we respond to his guidance. We can either make Jehovah feel pain or make his heart rejoice.—Ps. 78:41; Prov. 27:11.

#### LEARNING TO FEAR GOD

<sup>6</sup> We are not born with a fear of Jehovah; we must cultivate it. **(Read Psalm 34:11.)** One way we can do that is by examining creation. The more we see God’s wisdom, his power, and his deep love for us as expressed in “the things made,” the deeper our respect and love

for him will be. (Rom. 1:20) A sister named Adrienne said, “Jehovah’s wisdom as seen in creation amazes me and helps me realize that he knows what is best for me.” Her meditation led her to this conclusion, “Why would I want to do anything that would put a barrier between me and Jehovah, the Source of my life?” Can you spend some time this week thinking about an aspect of creation? Doing so will deepen your respect and love for Jehovah.—Ps. 111:2, 3.

<sup>7</sup> Another way we can develop our fear of God is by praying regularly. The more we pray, the more real Jehovah becomes to us. Each time we ask him for strength to endure a trial, we are reminded of his awesome power. When we thank him for the gift of his Son, we remind ourselves of Jehovah’s love for us. And when we supplicate Jehovah for his help with a problem, we impress on our heart just how wise he is. Such prayers deepen our respect for Jehovah. And they strengthen our resolve to avoid doing anything that would damage our friendship with him.

<sup>8</sup> We can maintain our fear of God by studying the Bible with the goal of learning from both the good examples and the bad examples that it contains. Let us discuss two faithful servants of Jehovah—King Ahab’s household steward Obadiah and High Priest Jehoiada. Then we will see what we can learn from King Jehoash of Judah, who started off well but later left Jehovah.

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4. What kind of fear of Jehovah does Satan want us to have?

5. What does it mean to fear God?

6. What is one way that we can learn to fear God? (Psalm 34:11)

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7. How can prayer help us to develop a healthy fear of Jehovah?

8. What can we do to maintain our fear of God?

Despite a ban on our work,  
a brother courageously  
distributes spiritual food  
to fellow Witnesses  
(See paragraph 11)



### LIKE GOD-FEARING OBADIAH, BE COURAGEOUS

<sup>9</sup> The Bible introduces us to Obadiah\* with the words: “Obadiah greatly feared Jehovah.” (**Read 1 Kings 18:3, 12.**) How did this wholesome fear affect Obadiah? For one thing, it made him honest and trustworthy; hence, the king put him in charge of the royal household. (Compare Nehemiah 7:2.) Obadiah’s godly fear also gave him extraordinary courage—a quality that he surely needed. He lived during the reign of wicked King Ahab, who “was worse in the eyes of Jehovah than all those [kings] who were prior to him.” (1 Ki. 16:30) Also, Ahab’s Baal-worshipping wife, Jezebel, hated Jehovah so much that she tried to wipe out true worship in the northern kingdom. She even killed many of God’s

\* This Obadiah is not the prophet Obadiah, who lived centuries later and who wrote the Bible book that bears his name.

9. How did fear of Jehovah affect Obadiah? (1 Kings 18:3, 12)

prophets. (1 Ki. 18:4) Without doubt, Obadiah worshipped Jehovah during a difficult time.

<sup>10</sup> How did Obadiah display extraordinary courage? When Jezebel began hunting down God’s prophets to put them to death, Obadiah took 100 of them and hid them “by groups of 50 in a cave and kept supplying them bread and water.” (1 Ki. 18:13, 14) If discovered, courageous Obadiah would surely have been executed. Of course, Obadiah was human, and he did not want to die. But Obadiah loved Jehovah and those who served Him more than he loved his own life.

<sup>11</sup> Today many of Jehovah’s servants live in lands where our work is banned. They show the secular authorities due respect, but like Obadiah, these precious brothers and sisters give to Jeho-

10. How did Obadiah display extraordinary courage?

11. How are Jehovah’s modern-day servants like Obadiah? (See also picture.)



vah what belongs to Him—exclusive devotion. (Matt. 22:21) They demonstrate their fear of God by obeying him rather than men. (Acts 5:29) They do this by continuing to proclaim the good news and by discreetly meeting together. (Matt. 10:16, 28) They are concerned that their brothers and sisters get much-needed spiritual food. Consider the example of Henri, who lives in an African land where our work was banned for a time. During the ban, Henri volunteered to distribute spiritual food to his fellow Witnesses. He wrote: “I am shy by nature. So I am convinced that it was the deep respect I feel for Jehovah that gave me the courage I needed.” Can you see yourself being as courageous as Henri was? You can be if you develop a healthy fear of God.

#### **LIKE GOD-FEARING HIGH PRIEST JEHOIADA, BE LOYAL**

<sup>12</sup> High Priest Jehoiada feared Jehovah, and that fear moved him to be loyal and to promote true worship. This was evident when Jezebel’s daughter, Athaliah, usurped the throne in Judah. The people had good reason to be afraid of Athaliah. She was ruthless and so greedy for power that she tried to murder the entire royal line—her own grandsons! (2 Chron. 22:10, 11) One of those children—Jehoash—survived because Jehoiada’s wife, Jehoshabeath, rescued him. She and her husband hid the child and took care of him. In this way Jehoiada and Jehoshabeath helped preserve the Davidic

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12. How did High Priest Jehoiada and his wife show great loyalty to Jehovah?

line of kings. Jehoiada was loyal to Jehovah and did not tremble in fear of Athaliah.—Prov. 29:25.

<sup>13</sup> When Jehoash was seven years old, Jehoiada again proved his loyalty to Jehovah. He formed a plan. If it succeeded, Jehoash would become king, David’s rightful heir. If the plan failed, however, Jehoiada would almost certainly lose his life. With Jehovah’s blessing, the plan succeeded. Jehoiada, supported by the chieftains and the Levites, made Jehoash king and had Athaliah executed. (2 Chron. 23:1-5, 11, 12, 15; 24:1) Jehoiada then “made a covenant between Jehovah and the king and the people, that they would continue as the people of Jehovah.” (2 Ki. 11:17) Jehoiada “also stationed the gatekeepers by the gates of the house of Jehovah, so that no one unclean in any respect could enter.”—2 Chron. 23:19.

<sup>14</sup> Jehovah earlier stated: “Those honoring me I will honor.” Indeed, he rewarded Jehoiada. (1 Sam. 2:30) For example, he had the high priest’s fine deeds recorded for our instruction. (Rom. 15:4) And when Jehoiada died, he was given the exceptional honor of being buried “in the City of David along with the kings, because he had done good in Israel with respect to the true God and His house.”—2 Chron. 24:15, 16.

<sup>15</sup> The account about Jehoiada can

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13. When Jehoash was seven years old, how did Jehoiada again display loyalty?

14. In what ways was Jehoiada honored for honoring Jehovah?

15. What can we learn from the account about Jehoiada? (See also picture.)



Like High Priest Jehoiada, may we be moved by godly fear to assist our brothers loyally  
(See paragraph 15)

help all of us to develop fear of God. Christian overseers can imitate Jehoiada by remaining alert and by loyally protecting God’s flock. (Acts 20:28) Older ones can learn from Jehoiada that when they fear Jehovah and remain loyal, He can use them to accomplish His purpose. He does not set them aside. Young ones can take note of how Jehovah treated Jehoiada and imitate Him by treating loyal older ones with dignity and respect, especially those with a long record of faithful service. (Prov. 16:31) Finally, we can all take a lesson from the chieftains and the Levites who supported Jehoiada. Let us loyally support “those who are taking the lead” by obeying them.—Heb. 13:17.

### DO NOT BE LIKE KING JEHOASH

<sup>16</sup> King Jehoshaphat benefited from the good influence of Jehoiada. (2 Ki. 12:2) As a result, the young king wanted to please Jehovah. But after Jehoiada died, Jehoshaphat listened to apostate princes. The result? He and his subjects “began serving the sacred poles and the idols.” (2 Chron. 24:4, 17, 18) Deeply hurt, Jehovah “kept sending prophets among them to bring them back . . . , but they refused to listen.” They did not even listen to Jehoiada’s son Zechariah, who was not only Jehovah’s prophet and priest but also Jehoshaphat’s cousin. In fact, without any gratitude for the family to whom he owed so much, King Jehoshaphat

16. What shows that King Jehoshaphat was weak?

had Zechariah killed.—2 Chron. 22:11; 24:19-22.

<sup>17</sup> Jehoash did not maintain a healthy fear of Jehovah, and things turned out badly for him. Jehovah had stated: “Those despising me will be treated with contempt.” (1 Sam. 2:30) A small Syrian army later defeated Jehoash’s “very large army” and “severely wounded” him. After the Syrians left, Jehoash was assassinated by his own servants for killing Zechariah. That wicked king was not even considered worthy of being buried “in the burial places of the kings.” —2 Chron. 24:23-25; see “son of Barachiah” study note on Matthew 23:35.

<sup>18</sup> What can we learn from the example of Jehoash? He was like a tree with shallow roots that depended on the support of a stake. When the stake—Jehoiada—was gone and the winds of apostasy blew, Jehoash toppled over. This powerfully illustrates that our fear of

17. How did things turn out for Jehoash?

18. According to Jeremiah 17:7, 8, how can we avoid being like Jehoash?

God must not depend solely on the good influence of fellow Christians, including family members. To remain spiritually strong, we must strengthen our own godly devotion and fear through regular study, meditation, and prayer. —**Read Jeremiah 17:7, 8; Col. 2:6, 7.**

<sup>19</sup> Jehovah does not really ask much of us. What he requires is summed up at Ecclesiastes 12:13, which says: “Fear the true God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole obligation of man.” When we fear God, we will be able to face future tests and stand firm like Obadiah and Jehoiada. Nothing will be able to damage our friendship with Jehovah.

19. What does Jehovah ask of us?

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**PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS** **Page 16:** In this reenactment, a brother distributes spiritual food while under ban. **Page 18:** A younger sister learns from an older sister how to do telephone witnessing; an older brother sets a courageous example in public witnessing; an experienced brother offers training in Kingdom Hall maintenance.

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## DO YOU RECALL?

- |                                      |   |   |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|
| ■ What does it mean to fear Jehovah? | ■ What valuable lessons can we learn from the steward Obadiah and High Priest Jehoiada? | ■ How can we avoid being like King Jehoash? |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|

**SONG 122**

Be Steadfast, Immovable!

**PREVIEW**

Christians want to cultivate a healthy fear of God. Such fear can safeguard our heart and protect us from sexual immorality and pornography. In this article, we will consider Proverbs chapter 9, which provides a vivid contrast between wisdom and foolishness by using two figurative women. We can enjoy lasting benefits from this chapter.

## Continue to Benefit From Godly Fear

*“The one walking in his uprightness fears Jehovah.”*

—PROV. 14:2.

REGARDING the moral standards promoted by this world, we feel as did righteous Lot. He “was greatly distressed by the brazen conduct of the lawless people,” knowing that our heavenly Father hates bad conduct. (2 Pet. 2:7, 8) Fear of God and love for him moved Lot to reject the low moral standards of the people around him. We too are surrounded by people who have little or no respect for Jehovah’s moral standards. Despite that, we can remain morally clean if we maintain our love for God and cultivate a healthy fear of him.—Prov. 14:2.

<sup>2</sup> To that end, Jehovah provides loving encouragement and motivation by means of the book of Proverbs. All Christians, men and women, young and old, can truly benefit from considering the wise counsel found there.

### FEAR OF GOD PROTECTS US

<sup>3</sup> A key reason to protect our figurative heart is that Jehovah examines our heart. This means that he looks past what we appear to be to others and sees who we really are on the inside. **(Read Proverbs 17:3.)** He will love us if we fill our mind with his life-giving wisdom. (John 4:14) We will thereby leave no room for the moral and spiritual poison coming from Satan and his world. (1 John 5:18, 19) As we draw closer to Jehovah, our love and respect for him will grow. Because we do not want to hurt our Fa-

1-2. Like Lot, what challenge do Christians face today?

3. According to Proverbs 17:3, what is one reason why we need to protect our heart? (See also picture.)





At our workplace, we need to guard against inappropriate friendships and invitations to share in questionable activities  
(See paragraph 3)

ther, we will hate even the very thought of sinning. When tempted to do wrong, we will ask, ‘How could I deliberately hurt Someone who has shown me so much love?’—1 John 4:9, 10.

<sup>4</sup> Marta, a sister in Croatia who was tempted to commit immorality, wrote: “I found it hard to think clearly and to suppress the urge to enjoy the temporary pleasure of sin. But fear of Jehovah protected me.”\* How did fear of God do that? Marta said that she meditated on the consequences that a bad decision would bring. We can do the same. The worst consequence is that we will sadden Jehovah and not be in line to worship him forever.—Gen. 6:5, 6.

\* Some names have been changed.

4. How did fear of Jehovah protect a sister from giving in to temptation?

<sup>5</sup> When we fear Jehovah, we are careful not to excuse bad behavior. Leo, who lives in Congo, learned that lesson. Four years after his baptism, he got involved with bad association. He thought that as long as he personally did not engage in bad practices, he was not sinning against Jehovah. Soon, though, his bad associates led him to abuse alcohol and to commit immorality. He then began to reflect on what his Christian parents had taught him and on the happiness that he had lost. The result? He came to his senses. With help from the elders, he returned to Jehovah. Today he serves happily as an elder and a special pioneer.

<sup>6</sup> Let us consider Proverbs chapter 9,

5. What can you learn from Leo’s experience?

6. What two figurative women will we now discuss?

where we read about wisdom and foolishness, personified as two women. (Compare Romans 5:14; Galatians 4:24.) As we do so, bear in mind that Satan’s world is obsessed with immoral sex and pornography. (Eph. 4:19) So it is vital that we continue to cultivate godly fear and turn away from bad. (Prov. 16:6) Consequently, all of us, whether male or female, can benefit from what this chapter presents. Each of the two women is described as extending an invitation to the inexperienced—those “lacking good sense.” Each says, as it were, ‘Come into my house and have a meal.’ (Prov. 9:1, 5, 6, 13, 16, 17) But there is a vast difference in the results, or outcomes, presented.

#### AVOID THE COURSE OF FOOLISHNESS

<sup>7</sup> Consider the invitation from the “stupid woman.” **(Read Proverbs 9:13-18.)** She boldly calls out to those lacking good sense, “Come in here” and feast. With what result? “Those powerless in death are there.” You may recall similar figurative language found earlier in Proverbs. We are warned about “the wayward” and “immoral woman.” We are told: “Her house sinks down into death.” (Prov. 2:11-19) Proverbs 5:3-10 contains an alert about another “wayward woman” whose “feet descend into death.”

<sup>8</sup> Those hearing the “stupid woman” face a choice: Will they accept her invitation or reject it? We might find ourselves facing such a choice. When con-

7. According to Proverbs 9:13-18, to what does one of the invitations lead? (See also picture.)

8. What choice is presented?



The “stupid woman” extends an invitation that can lead to tragic consequences  
(See paragraph 7)

fronted with sexual immorality or pornography, as is featured in the media and on the Internet, what will we choose?

<sup>9</sup> There are valid reasons why we should avoid sexually immoral conduct. The “stupid woman” is described as saying: “Stolen waters are sweet.” What are “stolen waters”? The Bible likens sexual intimacies that a married couple may enjoy to refreshing water. (Prov. 5:15-18) Husband and wife can find pleasure in appropriate sexual acts within their legal marriage. How different, though, with “stolen waters.” That may refer to

9-10. What are some reasons why we should avoid sexually immoral conduct?

illicit, immoral sex. Such often occurs in secret, just as a thief often steals in secret. The “stolen waters” may seem particularly sweet if those involved feel that they are getting away with their sinful course. What a sad deception! Jehovah sees all. Nothing could be more bitter than losing his favor, so there is nothing “sweet” about that tragic loss. (1 Cor. 6: 9, 10) But there is more.

<sup>10</sup> Sexual immorality can cause shame, a sense of worthlessness, unwanted pregnancies, and broken families. Clearly, it is the course of wisdom to avoid the stupid woman’s “house” and the meal. In addition to facing spiritual death, many immoral people contract diseases that lead to a premature literal death. (Prov. 7:23, 26) Verse 18 of chapter 9 concludes: “Her guests are in the depths of the Grave.” Why, then, do many accept her deceptive invitation that leads to tragedy?—Prov. 9:13-18.

<sup>11</sup> A common trap is pornography. Some think that viewing pornography is harmless. On the contrary, pornography is harmful, degrading, and addictive. Immoral images have staying power; they are difficult to erase from the mind. What is more, pornography does not deaden wrong desires; it inflames them. (Col. 3:5; Jas. 1:14, 15) Yes, many who view pornography go on to commit immoral acts.

<sup>12</sup> What should we as Christians do if a pornographic image shows up on our

electronic device? We should immediately reject the image. We can be helped to take such action if we recall that our most treasured possession is our relationship with Jehovah. Actually, images that are not generally considered pornographic might be sexually arousing. Why avoid them? Because we do not want to take even a small step toward committing adultery in our heart. (Matt. 5:28, 29) An elder in Thailand named David says: “I ask myself: ‘Even though the images may not be pornographic, will Jehovah be pleased if I keep looking at them?’ This kind of reasoning helps me to act wisely.”

<sup>13</sup> We are helped to act wisely by cultivating a healthy fear of displeasing Jehovah. Godly fear is “the beginning,” or foundation, “of wisdom.” (Prov. 9:10) This is illustrated positively in the opening part of Proverbs chapter 9, where we read about the other figurative woman, identified as “true wisdom.”

#### ACCEPT THE INVITATION FROM “TRUE WISDOM”

<sup>14</sup> **Read Proverbs 9:1-6.** Here we read of an invitation that originates with the Source and Foundation of true wisdom, our all-wise Creator. (Prov. 2:6; Rom. 16:27) The imagery here used mentions a large house with seven pillars. This illustrates that Jehovah is generous and welcomes all who want to apply his wisdom in their life.

<sup>15</sup> Jehovah is a generous, abundant

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11. Why is viewing pornography extremely harmful?

12. How do we show that we are on guard against sexually arousing images?

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13. What helps us to act wisely?

14. What contrasting invitation is presented at Proverbs 9:1-6?

15. What does God invite us to do?



Accepting the invitation from  
“true wisdom” can lead to life  
(See paragraphs 17-18)

Provider. These qualities are reflected in “true wisdom,” personified in Proverbs chapter 9 as a woman. The account mentions that this figurative woman has fully prepared her meat, mixed her wine, and arranged her table in her house. (Prov. 9:2, ftn.) Further, according to verses 4 and 5: “She [personified wisdom] says to the one lacking good sense: ‘Come, eat my bread.’” Why should we come to true wisdom’s house and eat the meal she offers? Jehovah wants his children to be wise and safe. He does not want us to learn life’s lessons the hard way—through bitter experience and with nagging regrets. That is why “he treasures up practical wisdom for

the upright.” (Prov. 2:7) When we have a healthy fear of Jehovah, we will want to please him. We hear his wise counsel, and we are happy to apply it.—Jas. 1:25.

<sup>16</sup> Consider how having godly fear helped Alain to make a wise decision. This Christian elder and school teacher related, “Many of my colleagues regarded pornographic films as a form of sexual education.” But Alain was not deceived. “Out of godly fear,” he said, “I categorically refused to view those films. I also explained the reason why to my colleagues.” He was applying the advice from “true wisdom” to “walk forward in the way of understanding.” (Prov. 9:6) Impressed by Alain’s firm stand, some of his fellow teachers now study the Bible and attend Christian meetings.

<sup>17</sup> Using the imagery of two figurative women, Jehovah has laid the basis for us to enjoy a blessed outcome. Those responding to the invitation from the loud and “stupid woman” focus on enjoying “sweet,” secret pleasures. Frankly, they are living for the moment, ignoring the future. Their outcome is in “the depths of the Grave.”—Prov. 9:13, 17, 18.

<sup>18</sup> How different it is for those who accept the invitation from “true wisdom”! Her guests now enjoy a banquet that is well-arranged and healthful, a feast of well-presented spiritual dishes. (Isa. 65: 13) Through the prophet Isaiah, Jehovah says: “Listen intently to me, and eat

16. How did godly fear help Alain to make a wise decision, and with what result?

17-18. What blessings are being enjoyed by those who accept the invitation from “true wisdom,” and what can they look forward to? (See also picture.)



## Godly Fear Benefits Us

- It draws us close to Jehovah.  
—Ps. 25:14; Heb. 5:7.
- It makes obeying him a “great pleasure.”  
—Ps. 112:1.
- It fosters humility, wisdom, and hatred of badness.—Job 28:28; Prov. 8:13.
- It gives us courage and moral strength.  
—Ex. 1:15-17, 21.
- It moves us to be kind and trustworthy.  
—Neh. 5:15; 7:2.

what is good, and you will find great delight in what is truly rich.” (Isa. 55:1, 2) We are learning to love what Jehovah loves and to hate what he hates. (Ps. 97:10) And we find satisfaction in inviting others to benefit from “true wisdom.” It is as if we were to “call out from the heights above the city: ‘Whoever is inexperienced, let him come in here.’” The benefits for us and for those who respond are not just for the here and now. They are enduring, allowing us to “live” forever as we “walk forward in the way of understanding.”—Prov. 9:3, 4, 6.

<sup>19</sup> **Read Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14.** May godly fear continue to safeguard our heart and help us to stand morally and spiritually upright during these wicked last days. That healthy fear will motivate us to keep on inviting as many as possible to seek “true wisdom” and benefit from it.

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19. In harmony with Ecclesiastes 12:13, 14, what should we be determined to do? (See also the box “Godly Fear Benefits Us.”)

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### HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| ■ How can a healthy fear of Jehovah protect our heart? | ■ How can we stay clear of the “stupid woman” and the consequences that come with accepting her invitation? | ■ What benefits will be ours if we accept the invitation from “true wisdom”? |
|--|---|--|

# Joyful Surprises and Lessons From Serving Jehovah

AS TOLD BY REINO KESK



AS A boy, whenever I saw an airplane overhead, I yearned to fly to some exotic country. To me, that seemed an impossible dream.

My parents left Estonia during World War II and went to Germany, where I was born. It was then that they were preparing to move to Canada. Our first home, near Ottawa, Canada, was a whitewashed corner of a chicken coop. We were extremely poor, but at least we had eggs for breakfast.

One day, Jehovah's Witnesses read Revelation 21:3, 4 to my mother. She was so touched by what she learned that she started to cry. The seed of truth grew, and both my mother and my father quickly progressed to baptism.

My parents' English was limited, but they took the truth seriously. Almost every Saturday, even after working all night as a nickel smelter in Sudbury, Ontario, my father took me and my younger sister, Sylvia, in service. And each week we studied *The Watchtower* as a family. Mom and Pop in-

stilled in me a love for God. That moved me to dedicate my life to Jehovah in 1956 at the age of ten. Their strong love for Jehovah has strengthened me throughout my life.

After graduating from high school, I became somewhat distracted. I thought that if I became a pioneer, I would never make enough money to realize my dream of flying and seeing the world. I found work at a local radio station as a disc jockey, a job I loved. But I worked evenings; thus, I regularly missed meetings and I associated with those who had no love for God. Finally, my Bible-trained conscience moved me to make changes.

I moved to Oshawa, Ontario. There I met Ray Norman, his sister Lesli, and other pioneers. They all took an interest in me. Seeing how happy they were moved me to re-evaluate my goals. They encouraged me to take up pioneering, which I did in September 1966. I was happy, and life seemed good. However, some life-changing surprises awaited me.

## WHEN JEHOVAH INVITES YOU TO DO SOMETHING, TRY TO DO IT

While I was still in high school, I applied for Bethel in Toronto, Canada. Later when I

was pioneering, I was invited to serve for four years at Bethel. But I really liked Lesli, and I feared that if I accepted this invitation, I would never see her again. After long, intense prayers, I finally accepted the call to Bethel and bade Lesli a sad farewell.

I worked in the Bethel laundry and later as a secretary. Meanwhile, Lesli became a special pioneer in Gatineau, Quebec. I often wondered what she was doing and whether I had made the right decision. Then came one of the most delightful surprises of my life. Ray, Lesli's brother, was invited to Bethel. He became my roommate! That led to my renewing my friendship with Lesli. We were married on the last day of my four-year assignment—February 27, 1971.

Lesli and I were assigned to serve in a French-language congregation in Quebec. After a few years, I was surprised to be invited to serve as a circuit overseer at the age of 28. I felt quite young and inadequate, but the words of Jeremiah 1:7, 8 encouraged me. However, Lesli had been in a couple of car accidents and had difficulty sleeping. So how could we manage in the circuit work? Nevertheless, she said, "If Jehovah invites us to do something, should we not try to do it?" We accepted the as-

signment and enjoyed the traveling work for 17 years.

Circuit life was busy, and I didn't always have enough time for Lesli. I had to learn another lesson. Early one Monday morning, the doorbell rang. There was no one there, just a picnic basket with a tablecloth, fruit, cheese, baguettes, a bottle of wine, glasses, and an anonymous note that read, "Take your wife on a picnic." It was a beautiful, sunny day. However, I explained to Lesli that I had talks to prepare and couldn't go. She understood but was a little sad. As I sat at my desk, my conscience started to bother me. I thought of Ephesians 5:25, 28. Were those words from Jehovah encouraging me to consider my wife's emotional needs? After praying, I said to Lesli, "Let's go," which delighted her. We drove to a lovely spot by a river, spread out a tablecloth, and had one of our most enjoyable days together. And I still got my talks prepared.

Our circuit assignments were joyful and many, from British Columbia to Newfoundland. My desire to travel was being realized. I had thought about Gilead School but had no desire to be a foreign missionary. It seemed that missionaries were special people, and I did not feel qualified. Besides, I was afraid

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### Starting circuit work in 1975



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### Traveling through the Baltics





A



B

that we might be sent to a country in Africa that was affected by disease and war. I was happy where I was.

### **SURPRISE INVITATION TO ESTONIA AND THE BALTICS**

In 1992 when the work was opening up in post-Soviet countries, we were asked whether we would be willing to move to Estonia and be missionaries. We were taken aback, but we prayed about it. Again we thought, ‘If Jehovah invites us to do something, should we not try to do it?’ We accepted, and I thought, ‘Well, we’re not going to Africa.’

We immediately started to learn Estonian. After a couple of months in the country, we were asked to do circuit work. We were to visit some 46 congregations and groups in three Baltic countries as well as in Kaliningrad, Russia. That meant trying to learn some Latvian, Lithuanian, and Russian. It was challenging. Still, the friends were touched by our efforts, and they helped us. In 1999, a branch office was opened in Estonia, and I was assigned to serve on the committee along with Toomas Edur, Lembit Reile, and Tommi Kauko.

We came to know many Witnesses who had been deported to Siberia earlier. Despite the harsh prison treatment and being separated from family, they never became bitter. They kept their joy and zeal for the

ministry. This helped us to see that we could endure and be joyful under difficult circumstances.

As the years sped by with very few days off, Lesli started feeling extreme fatigue. We didn’t immediately recognize the exhaustion that is associated with fibromyalgia. We seriously considered returning to Canada. When we were invited to branch school at Patterson, New York, U.S.A., I doubted that we could attend. However, after intense prayers, we accepted. Jehovah blessed the decision. It was while at this school that Lesli finally got the medical attention she needed. Consequently, we were able to resume normal activity.

### **ANOTHER SURPRISE —ANOTHER CONTINENT**

One evening in 2008, back in Estonia, I got a phone call from world headquarters asking if we would accept an assignment in Congo. I was stunned, especially because I needed to reply by the next day. Initially, I didn’t mention it to Lesli because I knew she wouldn’t sleep that night. Instead, I was the one who didn’t sleep, praying about my concerns regarding Africa.

The next day when I told Lesli, we reasoned: “Jehovah is inviting us to go to Africa. How do we know that we can’t do it and enjoy it unless we try?” So after 16 years in



- A. Speaking at a convention in Lithuania
- B. Branch Committee in Estonia, formed in 1999
- C. Giving a talk to a group of refugees
- D. Taking humanitarian and medical aid to Dungu, Congo



C



D

Estonia, we flew to Kinshasa, Congo. The branch office was an oasis of greenery and serenity. One of the first things Lesli put up in our room was a card that she kept since leaving Canada. On it were the words “Blossom where you’re planted.” After meeting the brothers, conducting Bible studies, and experiencing the delight of being missionaries, we had newfound joy. In time, we were privileged to make branch visits to some 13 other African countries. That allowed us to see the diversity and beauty of the people. My initial fears melted, and we thanked Jehovah for sending us to serve in Africa.

In Congo, we were introduced to foods, such as insects, that I thought we could not handle. But when we saw our brothers enjoying these, we tried them and were glad that we did.

We were able to bring spiritual and humanitarian aid to the east of the country where guerrilla groups were attacking villages and harming women and children. Most of the brothers had very little materially. Still, their strong hope in the resurrection, their love for Jehovah, and their loyalty to his organization touched our hearts. We were moved to reexamine and strengthen our own convictions. Some of the brothers had suffered the loss of homes and crops. That impressed on me how quickly material things can vanish and how valuable spiritual riches are. Despite severe hardships, the brothers seldom complained. Their outlook encouraged us to face our problems and health issues with courage.

### A TASTE OF ASIA

Then came another surprise. We were asked to move to the Hong Kong branch. We had never imagined living in the Orient! But after experiencing Jehovah’s loving hand in all our other assignments, we accepted the invitation. In 2013, with tears in our eyes, we left our dear friends and the wonders of Africa, not knowing what lay ahead.





Ready for life in Hong Kong



Korea branch

Hong Kong, a bustling and cosmopolitan city, was such a big change. The Cantonese language was a challenge. The brothers, though, warmly welcomed us, and we really enjoyed the local food. The work was expanding quickly, but property prices had skyrocketed. So the Governing Body wisely decided to sell most of the branch properties. Shortly afterward, in 2015, we were moved to South Korea, where we continue to serve. Here we face another challenging language, but we are heartened that although we have a long way to go, the friends see some progress in our ability to communicate in Korean.

### LESSONS LEARNED

Making new friends is not always easy, but we found that by taking the initiative to show hospitality to others, we can get to know people sooner. We have seen that our brothers are more alike than they are different and that Jehovah wonderfully designed us to be able to open our heart and have affection for so many friends.—2 Cor. 6:11.

We have seen the need to accept people as Jehovah does and to look for indications of Jehovah's love and direction in our lives. Whenever we felt down or wondered if we were accepted by others, we reread encouraging cards or letters from friends. We've certainly experienced how Jehovah has an-

swered our prayers, giving us reassurance and strength.

Over the years, Lesli and I have learned the importance of making time for each other, no matter how busy we are. We have also come to understand the need to laugh at ourselves, especially when trying to learn a new language. And each night, we try to look for something enjoyable to thank Jehovah for.

Frankly, I felt that I could never be a missionary or live in other countries. Yet, I have experienced the joy of learning how all things are possible with Jehovah's support. The words of the prophet Jeremiah come to mind: "You have fooled me, O Jehovah." (Jer. 20:7) Yes, he has given us many pleasant surprises and unimaginable blessings, even fulfilling my desire to travel by airplane. We have flown to many more places than I could ever have dreamed of as a boy, making branch visits on five continents. In all our assignments, I have deeply appreciated Lesli's supportive and willing spirit.

We continually remind ourselves of who we are doing this for and why. The blessings we enjoy today are just a foretaste of life forever when Jehovah will "open [his] hand and satisfy the desire of every living thing." —Ps. 145:16.

## After Jesus' birth, why did Joseph and Mary remain in Bethlehem instead of returning home to Nazareth?

■ The Bible does not say. But it does reveal interesting details that may have affected their choice.

An angel told Mary that she would become pregnant and give birth. When the angel delivered this message, Mary and Joseph were living in Nazareth, Joseph's hometown in Galilee. (Luke 1:26-31; 2:4) Later, when they came back from Egypt, they returned to Nazareth. Jesus grew up there and became a Nazarene. (Matt. 2:19-23) So we rightly associate all three—Jesus, Joseph, and Mary—with Nazareth.

Mary had a relative by the name of Elizabeth, who lived in Judah. Elizabeth was the wife of priest Zechariah and became the mother of John the Baptist. (Luke 1:5, 9, 13, 36) Mary had visited Elizabeth and stayed with her for three months in Judah. Then Mary returned to Nazareth. (Luke 1:39, 40, 56) Mary thus had some familiarity with the territory of Judah.

In time, Joseph obeyed the decree “to be registered.” Thus Joseph traveled from Nazareth to Bethlehem, which was “David’s city” and was the prophesied birthplace of the Messiah. (Luke 2:3, 4; 1 Sam. 17:15; 20:6; Mic. 5:2) After Mary gave birth to Jesus there, Joseph did not expect her to undertake the long trip back to Nazareth with a newborn. They stayed in Bethlehem, which was some nine kilometers (about 6 mi) from Jerusalem. It would thus be convenient for them to take their infant to the temple and make a proper offering.—Lev. 12:2, 6-8; Luke 2:22-24.

God’s angel had earlier told Mary that her son would receive “the throne of David”

and would “rule as King.” Might Joseph and Mary have found it significant that Jesus was born in David’s city? (Luke 1:32, 33; 2:11, 17) They may have thought it wise to continue there and await any further indications of God’s will for them.

We do not know how long they had been in Bethlehem when some astrologers arrived. By then, however, the family was living in a house, and their son was a “young child,” not an infant. (Matt. 2:11) It seems that rather than go back to Nazareth, they stayed in Bethlehem long enough to get settled in.

Herod ordered that “all the boys in Bethlehem . . . from two years of age and under” be killed. (Matt. 2:16) Having received a divine warning about this decree, Joseph and Mary fled to Egypt with Jesus and stayed there until Herod died. Later, Joseph took his family up to Nazareth. Why did they not go back to Bethlehem? To avoid Herod’s tyrannical son, Archelaus, who was in Judea, and to comply with God’s warning. In Nazareth, Joseph could safely raise Jesus as a true worshipper of God.—Matt. 2:19-22; 13:55; Luke 2:39, 52.

Apparently, Joseph died before Jesus opened the way to life in heaven. Joseph will thus be resurrected on earth. Many will be able to meet him and learn more details from him as to why he and Mary remained in Bethlehem after Jesus’ birth.

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Unless otherwise indicated, Scripture quotations are from the modern-language *New World Translation of the Holy Scriptures*.

*The Watchtower* (ISSN 0043-1087) June 2023 is published by Watchtower Bible and Tract Society of New York, Inc.; Harold L. Corkern, President; Mark L. Questell, Secretary-Treasurer; 1000 Red Mills Road, Wallkill, NY 12589-3299, and by Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Canada, PO Box 4100, Georgetown, ON L7G 4Y4. © 2023 Watch Tower Bible and Tract Society of Pennsylvania. Printed in Canada.

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### COVER PICTURE:

Gideon obediently reduced the size of his army, selecting 300 men who manifested alertness (See study article 25, paragraph 9)

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