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Build Strong Friendships Before the End Comes

“A true friend shows love at all times.”—PROV. 17:17.

SONG 101

Working Together in Unity

PREVIEW

As the end draws near, we all need to strengthen our relationships with fellow believers. In this article, we will examine what we can learn from the experience of Jeremiah. We will also discuss how developing close friendships today will help us in times of trial.

AS WE move deeper into “the last days,” we may face severe adversities. (2 Tim. 3:1) For example, after an election campaign, a country in western Africa was torn apart by social unrest and mob violence. For over six months, our brothers and sisters could not move about freely because they were in a combat zone. What helped them to cope with such hardships? Some found refuge in the homes of brothers living in a safer area. One brother reported: “In such a situation, I appreciated having friends around me. We were able to encourage one another.”

² When “the great tribulation” strikes, we will appreciate having good friends who love us. (Rev. 7:14) So it is urgent that we build strong bonds of friendship now. (Read 1 Peter 4:7, 8.) We can learn much from the experience of Jeremiah, whose friends helped him survive during the time leading up to the destruction of Jerusalem.* How can we imitate Jeremiah?

* Events in the book of Jeremiah are not presented in chronological order.

1-2. According to 1 Peter 4:7, 8, what will help us to cope with adversities?

LEARN FROM JEREMIAH'S EXAMPLE

³ For at least 40 years, Jeremiah lived among disloyal people, including neighbors and possibly some relatives from his hometown of Anathoth. (Jer. 11:21; 12:6) However, he did not isolate himself. In fact, he expressed his feelings to his loyal secretary Baruch and ultimately to us. (Jer. 8:21; 9:1; 20:14-18; 45:1) We can well imagine that as Baruch wrote down Jeremiah's eventful story, the two developed deep affection and respect for each other.—Jer. 20:1, 2; 26:7-11.

⁴ For many years, Jeremiah had boldly warned the Israelites about what was going to happen to Jerusalem. (Jer. 25:3) In a further attempt to move the people to repentance, Jehovah asked Jeremiah to write His warnings on a scroll. (Jer. 36:1-4) As Jeremiah and Baruch worked closely together on this God-given task, which probably lasted several months, they no doubt had faith-strengthening conversations.

3. (a) What could have caused Jeremiah to isolate himself?
(b) What did Jeremiah disclose to his secretary Baruch, and with what result?

4. What did Jehovah ask Jeremiah to do, and how did this assignment strengthen the friendship between Jeremiah and Baruch?

⁵ When the time came for the contents of the scroll to be revealed, Jeremiah had to rely on his friend Baruch to deliver the message. (Jer. 36:5, 6) Baruch courageously fulfilled his dangerous assignment. Can you imagine how proud Jeremiah must have felt when Baruch went to the temple courtyard and did what he had been asked to do? (Jer. 36:8-10) The princes of Judah heard what Baruch had done, and they commanded him to read the scroll aloud to them! (Jer. 36:14, 15) The princes decided to tell King Jehoiakim

5. How did Baruch prove to be a good friend to Jeremiah?

We will need good friends during “the great tribulation”
(See paragraph 2)



what Jeremiah had said. Considerately, they told Baruch: “Go and hide yourselves, you and Jeremiah, and do not let anyone know where you are.” (Jer. 36:16-19) That was good advice!

⁶ King Jehoiakim got so angry when he heard the words written by Jeremiah that he burned the scroll and ordered the arrest of Jeremiah and Baruch. However, Jeremiah was not intimidated. He took another scroll, gave it to Baruch, and as Jeremiah dictated Jehovah’s message, Baruch wrote “all the words of the scroll that King Jehoiakim of Judah had burned in the fire.”—Jer. 36:26-28, 32.

⁷ People who live through a trial together often form a close bond. So we can imagine that as they worked together to replace the scroll destroyed by wicked King Jehoiakim, Jeremiah and Baruch developed greater appreciation for each other’s qualities. How can we benefit from the example set by these two faithful men?

HEART-TO-HEART COMMUNICATION

⁸ We may find it difficult to open up to others be-

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6. How did Jeremiah and Baruch respond to opposition?
 7. What likely happened as Jeremiah and Baruch worked together?
 8. What might hinder us from making close friends, and why should we not give up?

cause someone might have hurt us in the past. (Prov. 18:19, 24) Or we may feel that we lack the time and energy to cultivate close relationships. However, we should not give up. If we want our brothers to stand by us when trials come, we must learn to trust them now with our thoughts and feelings. That is an important step toward becoming true friends.—1 Pet. 1:22.

⁹ Jesus showed that he trusted his friends by communicating openly with them. (John 15:15) We can imitate him by sharing our joys, concerns, and disappointments with others. Listen carefully as someone talks to you, and you may learn that you have many thoughts, feelings, and goals in common. Consider the example of Cindy, a sister in her 20's. She befriended a pioneer in her 60's named Marie-Louise. Cindy and Marie-Louise work together in field service every Thursday morning, and they talk freely with each other about a variety of subjects. Cindy says, "I enjoy having deep conversations with friends because this helps me to know and understand them better." Friendship thrives in the warm atmosphere of

9. (a) How did Jesus show that he trusted his friends? (b) How can open communication help you to deepen your relationships with others? Give an example.

open communication. Like Cindy, if you take the initiative to have warm and open conversations with others, your friendships with them are likely to grow.—Prov. 27:9.

WORK TOGETHER

¹⁰ As happened in the case of Jeremiah and Baruch, when we work alongside fellow believers and observe firsthand their endearing qualities, we learn from them and draw closer to them. (Read Proverbs 27:17.) For example, how do you feel when you are in the ministry and you hear your friend boldly defend his faith or speak with heartfelt conviction about Jehovah and his purposes? Likely you feel drawn to him even more.

¹¹ Consider two experiences that show how working in the ministry draws people together. Adeline, a 23-year-old sister, asked one of her friends, Candice, to go with her to preach in seldom-worked territory. “We wanted to be more motivated and to enjoy the ministry more,” she says. “We both needed a spiritual boost.” How did they ben-

10. According to Proverbs 27:17, what can result when we work alongside fellow believers?

11-12. Give an example of how sharing in the ministry can help us to strengthen our friendships.

efit from working together? “At the end of each day,” says Adeline, “we discussed how we felt, what touched us about the conversations we had, and how we sensed Jehovah’s direction in our ministry. We both enjoyed these deep discussions and got to know each other even better.”

¹² Laila and Marianne, two single sisters from France, went preaching for five weeks in Bangui, the bustling capital of the Central African Republic. Laila recalls: “Marianne and I experienced difficulties, but thanks to good communication and genuine love, our friendship grew stronger. As I observed Marianne’s flexibility, her love for the local people, and her zeal in the ministry, my admiration for her increased.” You do not have to move to a foreign country to enjoy these benefits. Each time you work in your local territory with a brother or sister, you have the opportunity to get to know that one better and to strengthen your bond of friendship.

FOCUS ON THE POSITIVE, AND BE FORGIVING

¹³ Sometimes when we work closely with our

13. What challenge might we face when we work closely with our friends?

Good friends work together in the ministry, forgive one another freely, and give help to their brothers and sisters in need (See paragraphs 10, 16, and 18)



friends, we become aware not only of their strengths but also of their weaknesses. What can help us deal with this challenge? Again consider the example of Jeremiah. What helped him to see the good in others and to overlook their failings?

¹⁴ Jeremiah wrote the book named after him, and he likely also wrote the Bible books of 1 and 2 Kings. That assignment no doubt made him especially aware of Jehovah’s mercy toward imperfect humans. For example, he knew that when King Ahab repented of his bad deeds, Jehovah spared him from seeing his entire family destroyed

14. What did Jeremiah learn about Jehovah, and how did this help him?



during his lifetime. (1 Ki. 21:27-29) Similarly, Jeremiah knew that Manasseh did even more to offend Jehovah than Ahab did. Even so, Jehovah forgave Manasseh because he repented. (2 Ki. 21:16, 17; 2 Chron. 33:10-13) Those accounts must have helped Jeremiah to imitate God's patience and mercy in his own dealings with his close friends. —Ps. 103:8, 9.

¹⁵ Consider how Jeremiah dealt with Baruch when he temporarily became distracted in his assignment. Instead of quickly giving up on his friend, Jeremiah helped Baruch by sharing God's

15. How did Jeremiah imitate Jehovah's patience when Baruch became distracted?

kind but frank message with him. (Jer. 45:1-5)
What lessons can we learn from this account?

¹⁶ Realistically, we cannot expect perfection from our brothers and sisters. Therefore, once we have formed close friendships, we need to work hard at keeping those newly formed bonds alive. If our friends make a mistake, we may need to give kind but frank counsel based on God's Word. (Ps. 141:5) And if they hurt us, we need to forgive them. Once we have forgiven them, we must avoid the temptation to bring the offense up again in the future. (Read Proverbs 17:9.) How vital it is during these critical times to focus on the strengths of our brothers and sisters rather than on their weaknesses! Doing so strengthens the bond we share with them, and we will need close friends during the great tribulation.

SHOW LOYAL LOVE

¹⁷ The prophet Jeremiah proved to be a true friend in times of distress. For instance, after the court official Ebed-melech rescued Jeremiah from certain death in a miry cistern, Ebed-melech feared

16. As shown at Proverbs 17:9, what do we need to do to keep our friendships alive?

17. How did Jeremiah prove to be a true friend in times of distress?

that the princes would harm him. When Jeremiah learned about it, he did not remain silent, hoping that his friend would somehow cope on his own. Although Jeremiah was imprisoned, he did what he could by sharing Jehovah's comforting promise with his friend Ebed-melech.—Jer. 38:7-13; 39:15-18.

¹⁸ Today, our brothers and sisters face a variety of challenges. For instance, many suffer from natural or man-made disasters. When that happens, some of us may be able to welcome these friends into our home. Others may be able to help financially. But all of us can ask Jehovah to help our brothers and sisters. If we learn that a brother or sister is discouraged, we may not know what to say or how to react. But all of us have much to offer. For example, we can make time to be with our friend. We can listen sympathetically when he or she speaks. And we can share our favorite comforting scripture. (Isa. 50:4) What matters most is that you are there with your friends when they need you.—Read Proverbs 17:17.

¹⁹ We must be determined to build and maintain

18. According to Proverbs 17:17, how should we respond when a friend is going through hardship?

19. How will building strong friendships now help us in the future?

strong relationships with our brothers and sisters now. Why? Because our enemies will try to divide us by means of lies and misinformation. They will try to turn us against one another. But their efforts will be wasted. They will be unable to break our bonds of love. Nothing they do will disrupt the friendships we have formed. In fact, those friendships will last not only through the end of this system but for eternity!

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 5: This scene depicts what may happen in the future during “the great tribulation.” Several brothers and sisters take shelter in an attic. They find comfort in one another’s companionship during that time of trial.

Pages 10-11: The same brothers and sisters had formed strong friendships well before the beginning of the great tribulation.

HOW DO THE FOLLOWING THINGS HELP TO BUILD STRONG FRIENDSHIPS?

- Heartfelt communication
- Working together in the ministry
- Responding to one another in times of need

How Holy Spirit Helps Us

“For all things I have the strength through the one who gives me power.”—PHIL. 4:13.

SONG 104

God’s Gift of Holy Spirit

PREVIEW

This article highlights how God’s holy spirit can help us to endure. It also considers what we can do to benefit fully from holy spirit.

“WHEN I think about the trial I have gone through, I know that I could not have faced it on my own.” Have you ever said something like that? Many of us have. Perhaps you said it after reflecting on how you were able to cope with a serious illness or the death of a loved one. Looking back, you feel that you were able to go on from day to day only because Jehovah’s holy spirit provided you with “power beyond what is normal.”—2 Cor. 4:7-9.

² We also rely on holy spirit to deal with the influence of this wicked world. (1 John 5:19) In addition, we have to struggle against “wicked spirit forces.” (Eph. 6:12) With all these pressures in mind, we will consider two ways in which holy spirit helps us. Then we will discuss what we can do to benefit fully from holy spirit.

HOLY SPIRIT GIVES US POWER

³ Jehovah’s holy spirit helps us by giving us the power, or strength, to fulfill our responsibilities despite trials. The apostle Paul felt that he was able to keep working despite his trials because he relied on “the power of the Christ.” (2 Cor. 12:9) During his second missionary tour, Paul not only worked hard

1-2. (a) What helps us to go on from day to day? Explain. (b) What will we consider in this article?

3. What is one way in which Jehovah helps us to endure trials?

in preaching but also supported himself financially. He stayed in Corinth in the home of Aquila and Priscilla. They were tentmakers. Since Paul practiced the same trade, he worked with them part-time. (Acts 18: 1-4) Holy spirit gave Paul the power both to work secularly and to accomplish his ministry.

4 Read **2 Corinthians 12:7b-9**. In this passage, what did Paul mean when he said that he struggled with “a thorn in the flesh”? If you had a thorn stuck in your body, you would be in a lot of pain. So Paul was saying that he faced a painful personal trial of some sort. He called this trial “an angel of Satan” that kept “slapping” (“beating,” *ftn.*) him. Satan or his demon angels may not directly have caused Paul’s trials, as if driving a thorn into his flesh. But when those wicked spirits noticed the “thorn,” they may have been eager to push it in deeper, so to speak, to increase Paul’s pain. What did Paul do?

5 At first, Paul wanted to be rid of the “thorn.” He admits: “Three times I begged the Lord [Jehovah] . . . that it would depart from me.” Yet, despite Paul’s prayers, the thorn in the flesh remained. Does this mean that Jehovah did not answer Paul’s

4. According to 2 Corinthians 12:7b-9, what struggle did Paul have?

5. How did Jehovah respond to Paul’s prayers?

prayers? Not at all. He did answer them. Jehovah did not remove the problem, but he did give Paul the strength to endure it. Jehovah said: “My power is being made perfect in weakness.” (2 Cor. 12:8, 9) And with God’s help, Paul was able to maintain his joy and inner peace!—Phil. 4:4-7.

⁶ Like Paul, have you ever begged Jehovah to deliver you from a trial? If despite your earnest pleadings the problem persisted—or even got worse—did you worry that perhaps Jehovah was displeased with you? If so, remember Paul’s example. Just as Jehovah answered his prayers, He will certainly respond to your prayers! Jehovah may not remove the problem. But by means of holy spirit, he will give you the strength you need to endure the trial. (Ps. 61:3, 4) You may be “knocked down,” but Jehovah will not abandon you.—2 Cor. 4:8, 9; Phil. 4:13.

HOLY SPIRIT MOVES US FORWARD

⁷ What is yet another way in which holy spirit helps us? Like a favorable wind on a stormy sea, holy spirit moves us forward through stormy trials to the haven of God’s promised new world.

6. (a) How may Jehovah respond to our prayers? (b) What assurances found in the cited scriptures give you strength?

7-8. (a) In what way is holy spirit like the wind? (b) How did Peter describe the working of holy spirit?

⁸ As a fisherman, the apostle Peter was accustomed to sailing. So it is worth noting that he described the working of holy spirit by using an expression that apparently is related to sailing. He wrote: “Prophecy was at no time brought by man’s will, but men spoke from God as they were moved by holy spirit.” The Greek word translated “moved” literally means “carried along; borne along.”—2 Pet. 1: 21; ftn.

⁹ What word picture did Peter draw with the expression “borne along”? A similar form of the same Greek word was used by Luke, the writer of Acts, to describe a ship that is “driven along” by the wind. (Acts 27:15) So when Peter wrote that Bible writers were “borne along,” he used “a fascinating maritime metaphor,” as one Bible scholar put it. Peter said, in effect, that just as a ship is carried along by the wind to accomplish its journey, so Bible prophets and writers were borne along by holy spirit to accomplish their task. The same scholar said: “The prophets raised their sails, so to speak.” Jehovah did his part. He provided “the wind,” or holy spirit. The Bible writers did their part. They worked in harmony with the direction of that spirit.

9. What word picture did Peter draw by using the expression “borne along”?

¹⁰ Of course, the time for recording inspired writings has passed for now. However, holy spirit is still exerting power on God's people. Jehovah is still doing his part. How can we benefit from God's holy spirit? We need to make sure that we keep doing our part. How do we do that?

¹¹ Think of this comparison. To benefit from the wind, a sailor must do two things. First, he has to put his boat in the path of the wind. After all, his boat will not move forward if the sailor remains in a harbor far away from where the wind is blowing. Second, he needs to raise and unfurl his sails as fully as possible. Obviously, even with the wind blowing, his boat will move forward only if the sails catch the wind. Similarly, we will endure in Jehovah's service only if we have the help of holy spirit. To benefit from that spirit, we must take two steps. First, we must put ourselves squarely in the path of God's spirit by sharing in activities that bring us under its influence. Second, we need to "raise our sails" as fully as possible by being fully engaged in these activities to the best of our ability. (Ps. 119:32) When we take these steps, holy spirit will push us forward through waves of opposition and trials and will help us to endure faithfully on the course to God's new world.

10-11. What two steps do we need to take to ensure that we are moved by holy spirit? Illustrate.



STEP 1:
Share in spiritual
activities on a
regular basis
(See paragraph 11)



STEP 2:
Be fully engaged
in those spiritual
activities to the best
of your ability
(See paragraph 11)



12 So far we have discussed two ways in which holy spirit helps us. Holy spirit gives us power and helps us to stay faithful while facing trials. Holy spirit also moves us forward and helps us to remain on the path to life everlasting. Now we will consider four things we must do to benefit fully from holy spirit.

HOW TO BENEFIT FULLY FROM HOLY SPIRIT

13 *First, study God's Word.* (Read 2 Timothy 3:16, 17.) The Greek word translated "inspired of God"

12. What will we now consider?

13. According to 2 Timothy 3:16, 17, what can the Scriptures do for us, but what must we do?

literally means “God-breathed.” God used his spirit to “breathe” his thoughts into the minds of Bible writers. When we read the Bible and meditate on what we read, God’s instructions enter our mind and heart. Those inspired thoughts move us to bring our life in line with God’s will. (Heb. 4:12) But to benefit fully from holy spirit, we must set aside time to study the Bible regularly and to think deeply about what we read. Then God’s Word will influence all that we say and do.

¹⁴ *Second, worship God together.* (Ps. 22:22) In a sense, our Christian meetings are events where “the wind is blowing.” Jehovah’s spirit is present at meetings. (Rev. 2:29) Why can we say that? Because when we meet for worship with fellow Christians, we pray for holy spirit, we sing Kingdom songs based on God’s Word, and we listen to Bible-based instruction presented by brothers who have been appointed by holy spirit. And that same holy spirit helps sisters prepare and deliver their parts. To benefit fully from holy spirit, however, we need to come prepared to participate in the meetings. That way, we attend the meetings with “unfurled sails.”

¹⁵ *Third, share in the preaching work.* When we use

14. (a) Why can we say that “the wind is blowing” at our Christian meetings? (b) How can we attend meetings with “unfurled sails”?

15. How is holy spirit involved in the preaching work?

the Bible in the preaching and teaching work, we allow holy spirit to be involved in our ministry. (Rom. 15:18, 19) To benefit fully from God's spirit, though, you must have a regular share in the preaching work and use the Bible whenever possible. One way you can make your ministry more meaningful is by using the sample conversations from the *Life and Ministry Meeting Workbook*.

¹⁶ *Fourth, pray to Jehovah.* (Matt. 7:7-11; Luke 11:13) The most direct way to obtain holy spirit is to ask Jehovah for it in prayer. Nothing can stop our prayers from reaching Jehovah or block the good gift of God's spirit from reaching us—not any prison wall and not even Satan. (Jas. 1:17) How should we pray so that we benefit fully from holy spirit? To answer, let us examine the subject of prayer in more detail by considering an illustration found only in Luke's Gospel.*

PRAY WITH PERSISTENCE

¹⁷ **Read Luke 11:5-9, 13.** Jesus' illustration shows

* Luke, more than any other Gospel writer, highlights that prayer was a prominent part of Jesus' life.—Luke 3:21; 5:16; 6:12; 9:18, 28, 29; 18:1; 22:41, 44.

16. What is the most direct way to obtain holy spirit?

17. What lesson about prayer can we learn from Jesus' illustration recorded at Luke 11:5-9, 13?

Benefit Fully From Holy Spirit

We need holy spirit to push us forward through waves of opposition and trials. Here are four essential activities that put us in the path of God's spirit

(See paragraphs 13-16)



**STUDY
GOD'S
WORD**

**ATTEND
MEETINGS**

**SHARE IN
PREACHING**

**PRAY TO
JEHOVAH**

how we should pray for holy spirit. In the illustration, the man received what he needed “because of his bold persistence.” He was not afraid to ask his friend for help even though it was late at night. (See study note on Luke 11:8.) How did Jesus apply this illustration to prayer? He said: “Keep on asking, and it will be given you; keep on seeking, and you will find; keep on knocking, and it will be opened to you.” So, what is the lesson for us? To receive the help of holy spirit, we must *pray for it with persistence.*

¹⁸ Jesus’ illustration also helps us to see *why Jehovah will give us holy spirit.* The man in the illustration wanted to be a good host. He felt compelled to serve food to his late-night visitor but had nothing to offer him. Jesus said that the neighbor responded because of the man’s bold persistence in asking for bread. What was Jesus’ point? If an imperfect human is willing to help a persistent neighbor, how much more so will our kind heavenly Father help those who persistently ask him for holy spirit! Therefore, we can pray with confidence that Jehovah will respond to our urgent request for holy spirit.—Ps. 10:17; 66:19.

18. According to Jesus’ illustration, why can we be confident that Jehovah will give us his holy spirit?

19 We can be sure that in spite of Satan’s relentless efforts to defeat us, we will be victorious. Why? Because holy spirit helps us in two ways. First, it gives us the power we need to overcome trials. Second, it is the force that “fills our sails,” helping us to move forward in serving Jehovah with life in God’s new world in view. Let us be determined to benefit fully from the help of holy spirit!

19. Why can we be sure that we will be victorious?

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 21: STEP 1: A brother and sister arrive at the Kingdom Hall. By meeting together with fellow believers, they share in an event where Jehovah’s spirit is present. STEP 2: They are prepared to participate in the meeting. The same two-step approach holds true for the other activities considered in this article: studying God’s Word, sharing in the preaching work, and praying to Jehovah.

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- What are two ways in which holy spirit helps us?
- By taking what steps can we benefit fully from holy spirit?
- How should we pray for holy spirit?

Are You Maintaining Your “Large Shield of Faith”?

“Take up the large shield of faith.”—EPH. 6:16.

SONG 119

We Must Have Faith

PREVIEW

Soldiers relied on their shield to protect them from harm. Our faith acts like a shield. And like a literal shield, our faith needs to be maintained. This article discusses what we can do to make sure that our “large shield of faith” is in good condition.

DO YOU have a “large shield of faith”? (Read Ephesians 6:16.) No doubt you do. Like a large shield that protects most of the body, your faith protects you from the immoral, violent, and godless influences of this corrupt system of things.

² However, we are living in “the last days,” and our faith will continue to be tested. (2 Tim. 3:1) How can you inspect your shield of faith to make sure that it is strong? And how can you keep a firm hold on your shield? Let us consider the answers to those questions.

CAREFULLY INSPECT YOUR SHIELD

³ In Bible times, soldiers often had shields that were covered with leather. The soldiers oiled the shields to preserve the leather and to keep the metal parts free from rust. If a soldier discovered that his shield was damaged, he made sure that it was repaired so that he was always ready for the next battle. How does that example apply to your faith?

⁴ Like soldiers of ancient times, you must regular-

1-2. (a) According to Ephesians 6:16, why do we need a “large shield of faith”? (b) What questions will we consider?

3. What did soldiers do to their shields, and why?

4. Why must you inspect your shield of faith, and how should you do that?

ly inspect and maintain your shield of faith so that you are always prepared for battle. As Christians, we wage a spiritual battle and our enemies include wicked spirits. (Eph. 6:10-12) No one else can maintain your shield of faith for you. How can you be sure that you are ready to face tests? First, you must pray for God's help. Then, you need to use God's Word to help you see yourself as God sees you. (Heb. 4:12) The Bible states: "Trust in Jehovah with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding." (Prov. 3:5, 6) With that in mind, why not review some of the decisions you have made recently? For example, have you faced a serious financial problem? Did Jehovah's promise recorded at Hebrews 13:5 come to mind: "I will never leave you, and I will never abandon you"? Did that promise give you confidence that Jehovah would help you? If so, that indicates that you are keeping your shield of faith in good condition.

⁵ You might be surprised at what you find when you carefully examine your faith. You may discover weaknesses that have gone unnoticed for some time. For example, you may realize that undue anxiety, lies, and discouragement have damaged your faith. If this has happened to you, how can you protect your faith from further harm?

5. What might you find when you examine your faith?

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM UNDUE ANXIETY, LIES, AND DISCOURAGEMENT

⁶ Some types of anxiety are good. For example, we are properly concerned about pleasing Jehovah and Jesus. (1 Cor. 7:32) If we commit a serious sin, we are anxious to restore our friendship with God. (Ps. 38:18) We are also anxious to please our marriage mate and to care for the welfare of our family members and fellow believers.—1 Cor. 7:33; 2 Cor. 11:28.

⁷ On the other hand, *undue anxiety* could damage our faith. For example, we may constantly worry about having enough food and clothing. (Matt. 6:31, 32) To ease that worry, we might focus on gaining material possessions. We could even develop a love of money. If we allow that to happen, our faith in Jehovah will become weak and we will suffer serious spiritual harm. (Mark 4:19; 1 Tim. 6:10) Or we might fall victim to another type of undue anxiety—becoming overly concerned about gaining the approval of others. We may then fear being ridiculed or persecuted by men more than we fear displeasing Jehovah. To protect ourselves from that danger, we must beg Jehovah to give us the faith and courage

6. What are some examples of good anxiety?

7. According to Proverbs 29:25, why do we not need to fear man?

we need to face the challenge.—Read Proverbs 29:25; Luke 17:5.

⁸ Satan, “the father of the lie,” uses those under his control to spread *lies* about Jehovah and about our brothers and sisters. (John 8:44) For instance, apostates publish lies and distort facts about Jehovah’s organization on websites and through television and other media. Those lies are among Satan’s “burning arrows.” (Eph. 6:16) How should we respond if someone confronts us with such lies? We reject them! Why? Because we have faith in Jehovah and we trust our brothers. In fact, we avoid all contact with apostates. We do not allow anyone or anything, including curiosity, to draw us into arguing with them.

⁹ *Discouragement* can weaken our faith. We cannot ignore our personal problems. In fact, it would be irresponsible of us to try to do so. And at times we may feel discouraged. But we must not allow our problems to dominate our thinking. If we do, we might lose sight of the marvelous hope that Jehovah has given us. (Rev. 21:3, 4) Feelings of discouragement could then drain our strength and cause us to give up. (Prov. 24:10) But that does not have to happen to us.

8. How should we respond to lies?

9. How can discouragement affect us?



After a battle, soldiers made sure that their shields were repaired
(See paragraph 3)

¹⁰ Consider how a sister in the United States is maintaining her faith while caring for her seriously ill husband. In a letter to headquarters, she wrote: “Our situation has been stressful and discouraging at times, but our hope is strong. I am so very impressed with the information we have been getting to strengthen our faith and lift our spirits. We really need this counsel and encouragement. It keeps us going and helps us to endure the trials that Satan hurls at us.” We learn from this sister’s comments that we can overcome discouragement! How? View

10. What do you learn from a letter written by one sister?



Are you maintaining your
“large shield of faith”?
(See paragraphs 8, 11)

your trials as being a test from Satan. Recognize Jehovah as being the Source of comfort. And appreciate the spiritual food he provides.

¹¹ Do you see any areas in your shield of faith that need maintenance? During the past few months, have you been able to avoid giving in to undue anxiety? Have you resisted the urge to listen to and argue with apostates about the lies they spread? And have you been able to cope with discouragement? If so, then your faith is in good condition. But we must

11. To test the condition of our faith, what questions should we ask ourselves?

remain on guard because Satan has other weapons that he tries to use against us. Let us now consider one of them.

PROTECT YOURSELF FROM MATERIALISM

¹² *Materialism* can cause us to become distracted and neglect our shield of faith. The apostle Paul said: “No man serving as a soldier involves himself in the commercial businesses of life, in order to gain the approval of the one who enrolled him.” (2 Tim. 2:4) In fact, Roman soldiers were not allowed to get involved in any trade. What might happen if a soldier ignored that requirement?

¹³ Imagine the scene. A group of soldiers spend the morning training with their swords, but one of their company is missing. That soldier is in town setting up a food shop. In the evening, the soldiers spend time inspecting their armor and sharpening their swords. But the one who owns the shop spends his time preparing food to sell the next day. The next morning, however, an enemy launches a surprise attack. Which soldier is more likely to act appropriately and earn the approval of his commanding officer?

12. What can materialism cause us to do?

13. Why would a soldier not become involved in commercial business?

And whom would you want standing beside you—a soldier who focused on being prepared or the one who was distracted?

¹⁴ Like good soldiers, we do not become distracted from our primary goal—gaining the approval of our Commanders, Jehovah and Christ. We view that as being more valuable than gaining anything Satan’s world has to offer. We make sure that we have the time and energy we need to serve Jehovah and to keep our shield of faith and the rest of our spiritual armor in good condition.

¹⁵ We must never let down our guard! Why? The apostle Paul warned that “those who are determined to be rich” will be “led astray from the faith.” (1 Tim. 6:9, 10) The expression “led astray” indicates that we could become distracted by trying to acquire unnecessary possessions. We could then expose our heart to “many senseless and harmful desires.” Rather than allowing those desires into our heart, we must see them for what they are—weapons that can harm us.

¹⁶ Suppose we have the financial means to buy

14. As soldiers of Christ, what do we value?

15. What warning did Paul give us, and why?

16. The account recorded at Mark 10:17-22 should move us to reflect on what questions?

many material things. Are we doing something wrong if we purchase things that we want but do not actually need? Not necessarily. But reflect on these questions: Even if we can afford to buy something, do we really have the time and energy to use and maintain the item? Also, might we become overly attached to our possessions? Could our attachment to material things cause us to act like the young man

A Christian sister keeps a firm hold on her large shield of faith by prayerfully reading God's Word, regularly attending meetings, and having a full share in the ministry

(See paragraph 19)



who turned down Jesus' invitation to expand his service to God? (Read Mark 10:17-22.) How much better it is for us to lead a simple life and spend our precious time and strength in doing God's will!

KEEP A FIRM HOLD ON YOUR SHIELD OF FAITH

¹⁷ We must never forget that we are at war and must be ready to fight the battle each day. (Rev. 12: 17) Our brothers and sisters cannot carry our shield of faith for us. We personally must keep a firm hold on it.

¹⁸ In ancient times, a soldier gained honor because of his bravery in warfare. But he would feel humiliated if he returned home without his shield. The Roman historian Tacitus wrote: "To have abandoned one's shield is the height of disgrace." That is one reason why soldiers made sure to keep a firm hold on their shields.

¹⁹ We keep a firm hold on our shield of faith by regularly attending Christian meetings and by speaking about Jehovah's name and his Kingdom to

17. What should we never forget?

18. Why did soldiers in ancient times keep a firm hold on their shields?

19. How can we keep a firm hold on our shield of faith?

others. (Heb. 10:23-25) In addition, we prayerfully read God’s Word every day and apply its counsel and direction in all that we do. (2 Tim. 3:16, 17) Then, no weapon that Satan uses against us will cause us any lasting harm. (Isa. 54:17) Our “large shield of faith” will protect us. We will stand firm, shoulder to shoulder with our brothers and sisters. And we will do more than win our daily battles—we will have the honor of being on Jesus’ side when he wins the war against Satan and his followers.—Rev. 17:14; 20:10.

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 33: When a report appears on TV about apostates who spread lies about Jehovah’s Witnesses, a Witness family right away turns off the TV. Later, during family worship, the father uses a Bible passage to strengthen the faith of the family.

HOW CAN WE PROTECT OURSELVES FROM . . .

- undue anxiety?
- lies and discouragement?
- materialism?

Lessons We Can Learn From the Book of Leviticus

“All Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial.”—2 TIM. 3:16.

SONG 98

The Scriptures—Inspired of God

PREVIEW

The book of Leviticus contains laws that Jehovah gave to ancient Israel. As Christians, we are not under those laws, but we can benefit from them. In this article, we will discuss valuable lessons we can learn from the book of Leviticus.

THE apostle Paul reminded his young friend Timothy that “all Scripture is inspired of God and beneficial.” (2 Tim. 3:16) That includes the book of Leviticus. How do you view that Bible book? Some may see it as a book that contains a list of rules that do not apply to our day, but true Christians have a different view.

² Leviticus was written some 3,500 years ago, yet Jehovah had it preserved “for our instruction.” (Rom. 15:4) Because Leviticus sheds light on Jehovah’s thinking, we should be eager to examine it. Actually, there are a number of lessons we can learn from that inspired book. Let us consider four of them.

HOW WE OBTAIN JEHOVAH’S APPROVAL

³ *First lesson: We need to have Jehovah’s approval for our sacrifices to be accepted.* On the yearly Day of Atonement, the nation of Israel came together and animal sacrifices were offered up. Those sacrifices helped to remind the Israelites that they needed to be cleansed of sin! But before the high

1-2. Why should Christians today be interested in the book of Leviticus?

3. Why were sacrifices offered on the yearly Day of Atonement?

priest brought any sacrificial blood into the Most Holy on that day, he first had to carry out another task, one that actually was more important than the forgiveness of the nation's sins.

⁴ Read Leviticus 16:12, 13. Visualize the scene on Atonement Day: The high priest enters the tabernacle. This is the first of three times he must enter the Most Holy on that day. In one hand, he holds a container filled with perfumed incense, and in the other, he balances a golden fire holder full of burning coals. He pauses before the curtain that covers the entrance to the Most Holy. With deep respect, he enters the Most Holy and stands before the ark of the covenant. In a symbolic sense, he is in the very presence of Jehovah God! Now the priest carefully pours the holy incense onto the fiery coals, and the room fills with a sweet-smelling aroma.* Later he will reenter the Most Holy with the blood of the sin offerings.

* The incense burned at the tabernacle was considered sacred, and in ancient Israel it was used only in the worship of Jehovah. (Ex. 30:34-38) There is no record that the first-century Christians burned incense for religious purposes.

4. As mentioned at Leviticus 16:12, 13, what did the high priest do during his first entry into the Most Holy on Atonement Day? (See cover picture.)

Notice that he burns the incense *before* he presents the blood of the sin offerings.

⁵ What can we learn from the use of incense on Atonement Day? The Bible indicates that the acceptable prayers of Jehovah's faithful worshippers are like incense. (Ps. 141:2; Rev. 5:8) Recall that it was with great respect that the high priest brought the incense into the presence of Jehovah. Similarly, when we approach Jehovah in prayer, we do so with deep respect. We are in awe of him. We deeply appreciate that the Creator of the universe allows us to approach him and draw close to him, as a child to a father. (Jas. 4:8) He accepts us as his friends! (Ps. 25:14) We appreciate this privilege so much that we would never want to disappoint him.

⁶ Remember that the high priest had to burn the incense *before* he could offer up the sacrifices. In that way, he made sure that he would have God's approval when offering up the sacrifices. What can we learn from that? While on earth, Jesus had to do something important—something more important than providing salvation for mankind—before

5. What can we learn from the use of incense on Atonement Day?

6. What can we learn from the fact that the high priest burned the incense *before* he offered up the sacrifices?

he could offer up his life in sacrifice. What was that? By living a life of integrity and loyalty, Jesus had to prepare the way for Jehovah to accept his sacrifice. In that way, Jesus would prove that doing things Jehovah's way is the right way to live. Jesus would vindicate—or prove right and just—his Father's sovereignty, or way of ruling.

⁷ Throughout his earthly life, Jesus maintained perfect obedience to Jehovah's righteous standards. No temptation or trial—not even the prospect of an agonizing death—could weaken his desire to defend his Father's way of ruling. (Phil. 2:8) When faced with tests, Jesus prayed “with strong outcries and tears.” (Heb. 5:7) His fervent prayers flowed from a loyal heart and strengthened his desire to remain obedient. To Jehovah, Jesus' prayers were like the aroma of sweet-smelling incense. Jesus' entire life course deeply pleased his Father and vindicated His sovereignty.

⁸ We can imitate Jesus by doing our best to live a life of integrity and of loyalty to Jehovah's ways and laws. When faced with tests, we pray fervently for Jehovah's help because we want to please him.

7. Why was Jesus' entire life course on earth pleasing to his Father?

8. How can we imitate Jesus' life course?

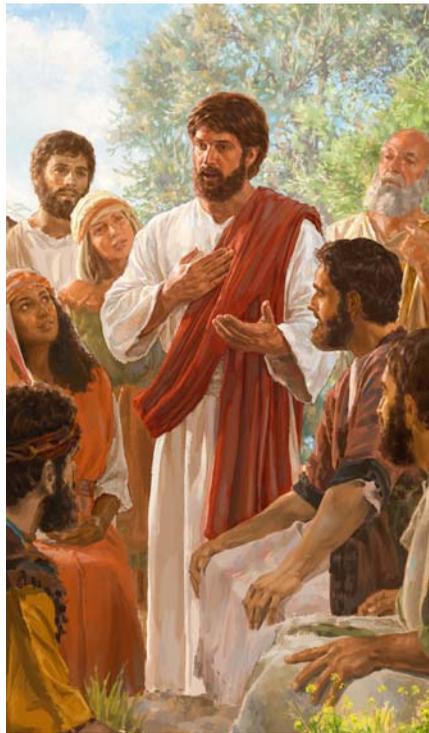
In such ways, we show our support of Jehovah's way of ruling. We realize that Jehovah will not accept our prayers if we are involved in conduct that he condemns. However, if we live according to Jehovah's standards, we can be confident that our heartfelt prayers will be like sweet-smelling incense to Jehovah. And we can be sure that our integrity and loyal obedience please our heavenly Father.—Prov. 27:11.

OUR SERVICE IS MOTIVATED BY GRATITUDE AND LOVE

⁹ *Second lesson: We serve Jehovah because we are grateful to him.* To highlight this, let us consider the communion offerings, another important aspect of true worship in ancient Israel.* In the book of Leviticus, we learn that an Israelite could offer a communion sacrifice “as an expression of thanksgiving.” (Lev. 7:11-13, 16-18) He made this offering, not because he had to, but because he wanted to. So this was a voluntary offering that the individual made because he loved his God, Jehovah.

* For more information about communion offerings, see *Insight on the Scriptures*, Volume 2, p. 526.

9. Why were communion sacrifices offered?



Love for Jehovah moves us to give him our best
(See paragraphs 9-12)

The person making the offering, his family, and the priests would eat the meat of the sacrificed animal. But certain parts of the animal sacrifice were offered up exclusively to Jehovah. Which parts?

¹⁰ *Third lesson: Out of love, we give Jehovah our best. Jehovah viewed the fat as the best part of an*

10. What do the communion sacrifices described at Leviticus 3:6, 12, 14-16 teach us about Jesus' motivation for doing his Father's will?

animal. He also specified that vital organs, including the kidneys, were of special value. (Read **Leviticus 3:6, 12, 14-16.**) So Jehovah was especially pleased when an Israelite voluntarily offered vital organs and the fat to him. The Israelite who made such an offering demonstrated his deep desire to offer the very best to God. In a similar way, Jesus willingly offered up to Jehovah his very best by serving Him whole-souled out of love for Him. (John 14:31) For Jesus, doing God's will was a delight; he had a deep love for God's law. (Ps. 40:8) How pleasing it must have been for Jehovah to see Jesus serve him so willingly!

¹¹ Like those communion sacrifices, our service to Jehovah is a voluntary expression of how we feel about him. We give Jehovah our best, and we do so because we love him with all our heart. How pleased Jehovah must be to see millions of willing worshippers serve him out of deep love for him and his ways! We can be comforted by remembering that Jehovah sees and values not only our actions but also our motives. For example, if you are elderly and can no longer do as much as you would

11. How is our service like those communion sacrifices, and how can that be comforting to us?

like, be assured that Jehovah sees beyond your limitations. You may feel that you have little to offer, but Jehovah sees the love deep within you that motivates you to do what you *can* do. He is pleased to accept the best that you can give.

¹² What can we learn from the communion sacrifices? As the fire consumed the best parts of the animal, smoke drifted upward and Jehovah was pleased. Be assured, then, that Jehovah is pleased with your willing, whole-souled service. (Col. 3:23) Imagine his smile of approval. He views your loving efforts in his service, large and small, as treasures that he will remember and value forever.—Matt. 6:20; Heb. 6:10.

JEHOVAH BLESSES HIS ORGANIZATION

¹³ *Fourth lesson: Jehovah is blessing the earthly part of his organization.* Consider what happened in 1512 B.C.E. when the tabernacle was set up at the foot of Mount Sinai. (Ex. 40:17) Moses presided over a ceremony to install Aaron and his sons as priests. The nation of Israel assembled to witness

12. What assurance can we draw from Jehovah's reaction to communion sacrifices?

13. According to Leviticus 9:23, 24, how did Jehovah show his approval of the priesthood?

the priests presenting their first animal sacrifices. (Lev. 9:1-5) How did Jehovah show his approval of the newly installed priesthood? As Aaron and Moses blessed the people, Jehovah caused fire to consume the remainder of the sacrifice on the altar.—Read Leviticus 9:23, 24.

¹⁴ What was accomplished by the awesome display at the installation of the high priest? Jehovah thereby showed his full support of the Aaronic priesthood. When the Israelites saw this clear evidence of Jehovah's backing of the priests, they had good reason to give them full support. Is that relevant to us? Yes! The priesthood in Israel was just a shadow of a much greater priesthood. Christ, the greater High Priest, has a royal priesthood of 144,000, who will serve alongside him in heaven.—Heb. 4:14; 8:3-5; 10:1.

¹⁵ In 1919, Jesus appointed a small group of anointed brothers as “the faithful and discreet slave.” That slave takes the lead in the preaching work and gives Christ's followers “food at the proper time.” (Matt. 24:45) Do we see clear evi-

14. Why is Jehovah's approval of the Aaronic priesthood of interest to us today?

15-16. How has Jehovah shown his approval of “the faithful and discreet slave”?



Jehovah is blessing and guiding his organization.
We give it our wholehearted support
(See paragraphs 15-17)

dence of God's approval of the faithful and discreet slave?

¹⁶ Satan and his world have done much to make the work of that faithful slave challenging, even impossible, to carry out from a human standpoint. Despite two world wars, relentless persecution, global economic crises, and unjust treatment, the faithful and discreet slave has continued to provide spiritual food for Christ's followers on earth. Think of the abundance of spiritual food available today, free of charge, in more than 900 languages!

It is undeniable evidence of divine backing. Consider further proof of Jehovah's blessing: the preaching work. The good news truly is being preached "in *all* the inhabited earth." (Matt. 24: 14) Without a doubt, Jehovah is guiding and generously blessing his organization today.

¹⁷ We do well to ask ourselves, 'Am I grateful to be associated with the earthly part of Jehovah's organization?' Jehovah has given us evidence that is as convincing as the literal fire from heaven back in the days of Moses and Aaron. We truly have much to be thankful for. (1 Thess. 5:18, 19) How can we show our support for the organization that Jehovah is using? By following the Bible-based direction we are given in our publications and at our meetings, assemblies, and conventions. In addition, we can show our support by sharing as fully as possible in the preaching and teaching work. —1 Cor. 15:58.

¹⁸ Let us be determined to apply the lessons we learned from the book of Leviticus. May we obtain Jehovah's approval for our sacrifices to be accept-

17. How can we show our support for the organization that Jehovah is using?

18. What are you determined to do?

ed. May we serve Jehovah because we are grateful to him. May we continue to give our best to Jehovah because we love him with all our heart. And may we wholeheartedly support the organization that he is blessing today. In all such ways, we can show Jehovah that we cherish the privilege we have to serve him as his Witnesses!

PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 45: An Israelite hands a sheep to a priest as a communion sacrifice to express his family's gratitude to Jehovah. During his ministry on earth, Jesus showed his deep love for Jehovah by keeping God's commandments and by helping his followers to keep them as well. An elderly sister, despite her physical limitations, gives her best to Jehovah by witnessing through letter writing. **Page 49:** In February 2019, Brother Gerrit Lösch of the Governing Body released the revised *New World Translation* in German to a grateful and enthusiastic audience. Today, publishers in Germany, like these two sisters, gladly use the newly released Bible in the ministry.

WHAT LESSONS CAN WE LEARN FROM . . .

- the use of incense on Atonement Day? (Lev. 16:12, 13)
- the communion sacrifices offered under the Law? (Lev. 3:6, 12, 14-16)
- the fire seen when the priesthood was installed? (Lev. 9:23, 24)

“Complete What You Started to Do”

“Complete what you started to do.”—2 COR. 8:11.

SONG 35

“Make Sure of the More Important Things”

PREVIEW

Do you regret some of the decisions you have made? Or do you sometimes struggle to make and implement good decisions? This article will help you to deal with those challenges and finish what you start.

JEHOVAH allows us to choose our course in life. He teaches us how to make good choices, and he helps us to succeed when we make decisions that please him. (Ps. 119:173) The more we apply the wisdom found in God’s Word, the better we become at making good decisions.—Heb. 5:14.

² Even when we make a wise decision, however, we may struggle to complete what we started. Consider some examples: A young brother decides to read the entire Bible. He does well for a few weeks but then stops for some reason. A sister decides to serve as a regular pioneer but keeps pushing back the date when she will begin. A body of elders makes a unanimous decision to be more involved in shepherding those in the congregation but after many months has not acted on it. These situations differ, but they have something in common. Those decisions were not fully implemented. First-century Christians in Corinth faced a similar challenge. Note what we can learn from them.

³ About 55 C.E., the Corinthians made an important decision. They learned that their brothers in Jerusalem and Judea were suffering hardships and poverty and that other congregations were collecting money to help them. Out of kindness and generosity,

-
- 1. What does Jehovah allow us to do?**
 - 2. What struggle may we face after we make a decision?**
 - 3. What decision did the Corinthians make, but what happened?**

the Corinthians resolved to donate to this effort and asked the apostle Paul how they could help. He sent instructions to the congregation and appointed Titus to assist in the collection. (1 Cor. 16:1; 2 Cor. 8:6) A few months later, though, Paul learned that the Corinthians had not followed through. As a result, their gift would not likely be ready in time for it to be taken to Jerusalem along with the contributions from the other congregations.—2 Cor. 9:4, 5.

⁴ The Corinthians had made a good decision, and Paul commended them for their outstanding faith and their earnest desire to be generous. But he also had to encourage them to complete what they had started. (Read 2 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 11.) Their experience teaches us that even faithful Christians may struggle to implement a good decision.

⁵ Like the Corinthians, we may find it difficult to carry out our decisions. Why? Because of imperfection, we may simply procrastinate. Or unforeseen events might make it impossible for us to follow through on what we had decided to do. (Eccl. 9:11; Rom. 7:18) How can we review a decision and discern if we should adjust it? And how can we be more effective at completing what we start?

4. As highlighted at 2 Corinthians 8:7, 10, 11, what did Paul encourage the Corinthians to do?

5. What questions will we answer?

BEFORE MAKING A DECISION

⁶ Some important decisions we would never change. For example, we stick to our decision to serve Jehovah, and we are determined to be faithful to our marriage mate. (Matt. 16:24; 19:6) Other decisions, though, may need to be adjusted. Why? Because circumstances change. What steps can help us to make the best decisions possible?

⁷ *Pray for wisdom.* Jehovah inspired James to write: “If any one of you is lacking in wisdom, let him keep asking God, for he gives generously to all.” (Jas. 1:5) In some respects, we are all “lacking in wisdom.” So rely on Jehovah both when making a decision and when reviewing that decision. Jehovah will then help you to make wise choices.

⁸ *Do thorough research.* Consult God’s Word, read the publications of Jehovah’s organization, and talk to people whom you can trust. (Prov. 20:18) Such research is vital before making a decision to change jobs, to move, or to choose appropriate education to help you support your ministry.

⁹ *Analyze your motives.* Our motives matter to

-
6. When might we need to adjust a decision?
 7. What should we pray for, and why?
 8. What research should we do before making a decision?
 9. How will we benefit if we are honest with ourselves?

Jehovah. (Prov. 16:2) He wants us to be honest in all things. So when we make decisions, we too want to be honest with ourselves and with others about our motives. If we were not completely honest, we would likely have difficulty sticking to the decision. For example, a young brother may decide to become a regular pioneer. After some time, however, he struggles to fulfill the hour requirement and he finds little joy in his ministry. He may have thought that his main motive for pioneering was his desire to please Jehovah. Could it be, though, that he was primarily motivated by a desire to please his parents or some person he admired?

¹⁰ Consider the situation of a Bible student who decides to give up smoking. At first, he struggles, doing well for a week or two, but then he gives in to the urge to smoke. Finally, though, he is successful! His love for Jehovah and his desire to please Him have helped him to conquer the habit.—Col. 1:10; 3:23.

¹¹ ***Be specific.*** The more specific you are, the more likely you are to complete what you start. For example, you may have decided to read the Bible more often. But if you do not have a specific schedule in

10. What is needed to make changes?

11. Why must you have specific goals?

mind, you may not achieve your objective.* Or the elders in a congregation may decide to shepherd the flock more often, but after some time, they have not followed through on that decision. To be successful, they could ask such questions as these: “Have we identified the brothers and sisters who could especially benefit from more shepherding? Have we set a specific time to visit them?”

¹² ***Be realistic.*** None of us have the time, resources, or energy to do everything that we would like to do. So be realistic and reasonable. When necessary, you may need to change a decision that was beyond your ability to accomplish. (Eccl. 3:6) Suppose, though, that you reviewed your decision, adjusted it as needed, and feel that you can implement it. Consider five steps that can help you to finish what you start.

STEPS TO IMPLEMENT YOUR DECISIONS

¹³ ***Pray for the strength to act.*** God can give you “the power to act” and carry out your decision. (Phil. 2:13) So ask Jehovah for his holy spirit to give you the

* To help you plan your personal Bible reading, you could use the “Schedule for Bible Reading” that is available on jw.org®.

12. What might we need to do, and why?

13. How can you gain the strength you need to carry out a decision?

BEFORE MAKING A DECISION

1. Pray for wisdom
2. Do thorough research
3. Analyze your motives
4. Be specific
5. Be realistic



AFTER MAKING A DECISION

1. Pray for strength
2. Create a plan
3. Exert yourself
4. Manage your time wisely
5. Focus on the outcome



power you need. Continue praying even if an answer to your request seems to be delayed. As Jesus said: “Keep on asking, and it [holy spirit] will be given you.”—Luke 11:9, 13.

¹⁴ *Create a plan.* (Read Proverbs 21:5.) To complete any project you start, you need a plan. Then you need to work according to that plan. Likewise, when you make a decision, list the specific steps you intend to follow to implement that decision. Breaking larger jobs into smaller tasks can help you track your progress more easily. Paul encouraged the Corinthians to set something aside for their contribution “on the first day of every week” rather than wait and try to collect funds when he arrived. (1 Cor. 16:2) Breaking large jobs into small tasks can also keep you from feeling overwhelmed.

¹⁵ A clear plan that you put in writing can help you turn your decisions into action. (1 Cor. 14:40) For instance, bodies of elders are directed to assign an elder to record each decision of the body of elders, including who is assigned to follow through and the suggested date for completion. Elders who follow this direction are more likely to carry out their decisions. (1 Cor. 9:26) You could try to do something similar

14. How can the principle stated at Proverbs 21:5 help you to implement your decision?

15. After making a plan, what can be done?

with your personal affairs. For example, you could prepare a daily to-do list and arrange the items in the order you intend to handle them. This can help you not only to complete what you start but also to get more done in less time.

¹⁶ *Exert yourself.* It takes effort to follow your plan and complete what you start. (Read Romans 12:11.) Paul told Timothy to “continue applying” himself and to “persevere” in becoming a better teacher. That advice applies equally to other spiritual goals.—1 Tim. 4:13, 16.

¹⁷ *Manage your time wisely.* (Read Ephesians 5:15, 16.) Choose a time to implement your decision and stick to it. Avoid waiting for the perfect time to act; the perfect time is not likely to come. (Eccl. 11:4) Be careful not to allow less important things to consume your time and rob you of the energy you need for the more important things. (Phil. 1:10) If possible, set aside time during which you have few interruptions. Let others know that you need time to concentrate. Consider turning off your phone and checking your e-mail or social media at a later time.*

* For more suggestions on managing your time, see the article “20 Ways to Create More Time” in the April 2010 issue of *Awake!*

16. What is essential in order to implement your decision, and how does Romans 12:11 support this?

17. How can we apply Ephesians 5:15, 16 in carrying out a decision?

¹⁸ *Focus on the outcome.* The result, or outcome, of your decision is like the destination of a journey. If you really want to reach that destination, you will keep going even if a road is closed and you thus must change your route. In the same way, if we focus on the outcome of our decisions, we will not give up easily when we encounter setbacks or detours.—Gal. 6:9.

¹⁹ Making good decisions is difficult, and implementing them can be a challenge. But with Jehovah's help, you can gain the wisdom and strength you need to complete what you start.

18-19. What can keep you from giving up on a good decision when you encounter setbacks?

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- What challenge do we face after we make a decision?
- What steps can we take to review a decision we have made?
- What steps can we take to be more effective at completing what we start?

What role did stewards play in Bible times?

IN Bible times, a steward managed the household or property of another person. The Hebrew and Greek words translated “steward” sometimes refer to an overseer or a household manager.

When Joseph, a son of the patriarch Jacob, was a slave in Egypt, Joseph became the steward over the house of his master. In fact, his Egyptian master “left everything that was his in Joseph’s care.” (Gen. 39:2-6) Later, when Joseph himself became a powerful ruler in Egypt, he appointed a steward over his own house.—Gen. 44:4.

In Jesus’ day, landowners often lived in cities away from their agricultural estates. So the landowners appointed stewards to oversee the day-to-day activities of the laborers who tended the land of these estates.

Who was qualified for the position of steward? The first-century Roman writer Columella advised that a slave who was appointed as an overseer, or a stew-

ard, should be “one who [had] been tested by experience.” He would be an individual who had “such qualities of feeling that he [would] exercise authority without laxness and without cruelty.” He added: “This above all else is to be required of him—that he shall not think that he knows what he does not know, and that he shall always be eager to learn.”

God’s Word uses the figure of a steward to illustrate some of the activities that take place in the Christian congregation. For example, the apostle Peter encourages Christians to use their God-given abilities “in ministering to one another as fine stewards of God’s undeserved kindness.”—1 Pet. 4:10.

Jesus himself used the example of a steward in the illustration recorded at Luke 16:1-8. Moreover, in a prophecy about the sign of his presence as King, Jesus assured his followers that he would appoint a “faithful and discreet slave,” or “faithful steward.” The main assignment of that steward would be to provide a steady supply of spiritual food for Christ’s followers during the time of the end. (Matt. 24:45-47; Luke 12:42) We are grateful to be among the recipients of the faith-strengthening publications that the faithful steward prepares and makes available worldwide.

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COVER PICTURE:

On Atonement Day, the Israelite high priest entered the Most Holy with incense and fiery coals to fill the room with a sweet-smelling aroma. Later, he reentered the Most Holy with the blood of the sin offerings (See study article 47, paragraph 4)

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