

# THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



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**SONG 95**

The Light Gets Brighter

**PREVIEW**

For many years we have believed that the prophecy recorded in Joel chapters 1 and 2 foretells our modern-day preaching activity. However, there are four good reasons why it appears that an adjustment should be made in our understanding of this portion of Joel's prophecy. What are those reasons?

## An Attack Coming From the North!

*"A nation has come up into my land."*—JOEL 1:6.

MORE than a century ago, Brother C. T. Russell and his associates, a small group of other students of God's Word, began to meet together. They wanted to see if they could learn what the Bible really teaches about Jehovah God, Jesus Christ, the condition of the dead, and the ransom. Their method of study was simple. Someone would raise a question, and then the group would examine every scripture text related to the subject. Finally, they would make a record of their findings. With Jehovah's blessing, those sincere Christian men discovered many fundamental Bible truths that we cherish to this day.

<sup>2</sup> As those Bible students soon found out, however, it can be one thing to learn what the Bible teaches about a certain doctrinal subject but quite another to discern correctly the meaning of a Bible prophecy. Why is that so? For one thing, Bible prophecies are often best understood when they are undergoing fulfillment or after they have been fulfilled. But there is another factor. To understand a prophecy correctly, we generally have to consider its context. If we focus on only one aspect of the prophecy and ignore the rest, we may draw the wrong conclusion. In hindsight, it seems that this has been the case with a prophecy in the book of Joel. Let us review that prophecy and discuss why an adjustment in our present understanding is needed.

1. What study method was followed by Brother Russell and his associates, and why was it effective?
2. What might sometimes lead to wrong conclusions when we are trying to understand Bible prophecy?

<sup>3</sup> **Read Joel 2:7-9.** Joel foretells that a plague of locusts will devastate the land of Israel. With teeth and jaws like those of lions, the greedy insects will devour everything in sight! (Joel 1:4, 6) For many years, we have applied that prophecy symbolically to the way in which Jehovah's people, like an unstoppable swarm of locusts, engage in their preaching activity. We understood that this activity has devastating effects on the "land," or the people who are under the control of the religious leaders.\*

<sup>4</sup> If we restricted ourselves to a reading of Joel 2:7-9, a case could be made for that explanation. However, when we consider the prophecy in its context, we see that a different understanding is appropriate. Let us examine four reasons why this is so.

#### FOUR REASONS FOR AN ADJUSTMENT

<sup>5</sup> First of all, notice Jehovah's promise with regard to the plague of locusts: "I will **drive the northerner** [the locusts] **far away** from you." (Joel 2:20) If the locusts represent Jehovah's Witnesses as they obey Jesus' command to preach and make disciples, why would Jehovah promise to drive them away? (Ezek. 33:7-9; Matt. 28:19, 20) Clearly, Jehovah is driving away, not his faithful servants, but something or someone who is hostile to his people.

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\* For example, see the article "Jehovah's Wisdom Observed in Creation" in *The Watchtower* of April 15, 2009, pars. 14-16.

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3-4. Until now, how have we applied the prophecy found at Joel 2:7-9?

5-6. What question arises from a consideration of (a) Joel 2:20? (b) Joel 2:25?

<sup>6</sup> As a second reason, consider what is written at Joel 2:25. There, Jehovah says: "I will **make compensation** to you for the years that the swarming locust, the unwinged locust, the voracious locust, and the devouring locust have eaten, my great army that I sent among you." Notice that Jehovah promises to "make compensation" for the damage the locusts have caused. If the locusts picture Kingdom evangelizers, this would suggest that the message they proclaim causes damage. Yet, that life-saving message can actually move some of the wicked to repent. (Ezek. 33:8, 19) What a blessing that could be for them!

<sup>7</sup> **Read Joel 2:28, 29.** Consider a third reason—the sequence of events outlined by the prophecy. Did you notice that Jehovah says: "**After that** I will pour out my spirit"; that is, after the locusts have completed their assigned task? If the locusts are preachers of God's Kingdom, why would Jehovah pour out his spirit on them **after** they finish their witnessing? The reality is that without the help of God's powerful holy spirit, they could never have kept preaching for decades despite opposition and even bans on their work.

<sup>8</sup> **Read Revelation 9:1-11.** Now let us look at the fourth reason. We previously connected the plague of locusts described by Joel with our preaching work because of a similar prophecy found in the book of Revelation. This prophecy describes a swarm of locusts that

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7. At Joel 2:28, 29, what is the significance of the words "after that"?

8. Whom do the locusts described at Revelation 9:1-11 represent? (See cover picture.)



## Prophecies About Locusts

—Similar But  
Different



### Joel 1:4; 2:7-9, 20

- They come from the north
- They devastate the vegetation
- They are driven away
- They represent the Babylonian army that invaded Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E.

### Revelation 9:1-11

- They come out of an abyss
- They are not to harm the vegetation
- They finish their work
- They represent Jehovah's anointed servants, who boldly proclaim his judgments

have human faces and 'what seem to be crowns of gold' on their heads. (Rev. 9:7) They torment "those people [God's enemies] who do not have the seal of God on their foreheads" for a period of five months, the average life span of a locust. (Rev. 9:4, 5) This does indeed appear to be a description of Jehovah's anointed servants. They boldly proclaim God's judgments against this wicked system of things and, as a result, make its supporters very uncomfortable.

<sup>9</sup> Admittedly, there are similarities between the prophecy in Revelation and

9. What significant differences are there between the locusts Joel saw and those described by John?

the one Joel recorded. However, there are significant differences. Consider: In Joel's prophecy, the locusts devastate the vegetation. (Joel 1:4, 6, 7) In John's vision, the locusts are "told not to harm the vegetation of the earth." (Rev. 9:4) The locusts Joel saw came from the north. (Joel 2:20) Those John saw came out of an abyss. (Rev. 9:2, 3) The locusts Joel described are driven away. In Revelation, the locusts are not driven away but are allowed to finish their work. There is no indication that they deserve Jehovah's disapproval.—See the box "Prophecies About Locusts—Similar But Different."



<sup>10</sup> The significant differences between the two prophecies lead us to conclude that they are not connected. Are we saying that the locusts described by Joel are not the same as the locusts presented in the book of Revelation? Yes. In the Bible, it is not unusual for a symbol to convey different meanings in different settings. For example, at Revelation 5:5, Jesus is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” whereas at 1 Peter 5:8, the Devil is described as “a roaring lion.” In view of the questions raised by our present understanding, we need to look for another explanation of Joel’s prophecy. What could it be?

#### WHAT DOES IT MEAN?

<sup>11</sup> A closer look at Joel’s prophecy in its context reveals that the prophet was predicting a military attack. (Joel 1:6; 2:1, 8, 11) Jehovah said that he would use his “great army” (Babylonian soldiers) to punish the disobedient Israelites. (Joel 2:25) The invading army is rightly called “the northerner” because the Babylonians would invade Israel from the north. (Joel 2:20) That army is likened to a well-organized swarm of locusts. Of them, Joel says: “Each [soldier] advances in his course. . . . Into the city they rush, on the wall they run. Onto the houses they climb, through the windows they enter like a thief.” (Joel 2: 8, 9) Can you picture the scene? There are soldiers everywhere. There is no

where to hide. No one can escape the sword of the Babylonians!

<sup>12</sup> Like locusts, the Babylonians (or, Chaldeans) invaded the city of Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E. The Bible reports: “The king of the Chaldeans, who killed their young men with the sword . . . , felt no compassion for young man or virgin, old or infirm. God gave everything into his hand. He burned down the house of the true God, tore down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its fortified towers with fire, and **destroyed everything of value.**” (2 Chron. 36:17, 19) When the Babylonians were finished with the land, onlookers could only say: “It is a wasteland without man and beast, and it has been handed over to the Chaldeans.” —Jer. 32:43.

<sup>13</sup> Some 200 years after Joel’s prophecy, Jehovah used Jeremiah to foretell something else about this attack. He said that a thorough search would be made for those Israelites who engaged in wicked practices—a search that would lead to their capture. “‘Here I am sending for many fishermen,’ declares Jehovah, ‘and they will fish for them. After that I will send for many hunters, and they will hunt them down on every mountain and every hill and out of the clefts of the crags. . . . I will repay the full amount due for their error and their sin.’” Neither the oceans nor the forests would be able to conceal the unrepentant Israelites from the Babylonian invaders.—Jer. 16:16, 18.

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10. Give a Scriptural example showing that the locusts described by Joel and by John can represent different things.

11. What clues do Joel 1:6 and 2:1, 8, 11 give us about the identity of the locusts?

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12. How was Joel’s prophecy about the locusts fulfilled?

13. Explain the meaning of Jeremiah 16:16, 18.

## “I Will Pour Out My Spirit”

On the day of Pentecost 33 C.E., about 3,000 men and women got baptized as disciples of Jesus Christ. They immediately began sharing the truth about Jesus with others. Did Jehovah bless their zealous activity? Without a doubt! “Many thousands” became obedient to the word about the Christ.—Acts 2:41; 21:20.

How many thousands had become believers? The Bible does not say, but even by the end of the first century, the number of believers must have been far fewer than 144,000. At that time, Jehovah was selecting men and women to be heirs of the heavenly Kingdom, but the majority of the anointed have been chosen in modern times. Still, the remarkable growth in the first century is proof that Jehovah had poured out his spirit on those early disciples.—Acts 2:16-18.

Is there evidence that Jehovah has poured out his spirit on his servants today? Definitely! Consider these facts: According to available records, in 1919 there were fewer than 6,000 publishers of the good news worldwide. Even so, Jehovah blessed the preaching work, and since 1983 far more than 144,000 people have got baptized as Jehovah’s Witnesses **every year!** Surely this is evidence that Jehovah has been fulfilling his promise about his servants: “I will pour out my spirit!”—Joel 2:28, 29.

## RESTORATION

<sup>14</sup> On a positive note, Joel now brings news of restoration. The land will be fruitful again. (Joel 2:23-26) Then at some point in the future, an ample supply of spiritual food will become available. “I will pour out my spirit on every sort of flesh,” says Jehovah, “and your sons and your daughters will prophesy . . . And even on my male slaves and female slaves I will pour out my spirit.” (Joel 2:28, 29) That outpouring of God’s spirit did not occur as soon as the Israelites were brought back from Babylon to their homeland. Rather, it took place centuries later, at Pentecost 33 C.E. How do we know?

<sup>15</sup> Under inspiration, the apostle Peter applied Joel 2:28, 29 to an amazing event that took place on that day of Pentecost. About nine o’clock that morning, there was a miraculous outpouring of holy spirit that moved those who received it to begin speaking “about the magnificent things of God.” (Acts 2:11) Under inspiration, Peter used slightly different wording when quoting Joel’s prophecy. Did you notice what adjustment he made? (**Read Acts 2: 16, 17.**) Instead of beginning the quotation with the words “after that,” Peter said: “And *in the last days*”—in this context, the last days of the Jewish system of things—God’s spirit would be poured out “on every sort of flesh.” This indicates that considerable time had passed before Joel’s prophecy was fulfilled.

14. When was Joel 2:28, 29 fulfilled?

15. According to Acts 2:16, 17, what adjustment to the text of Joel 2:28 did Peter make, and what does that indicate?

<sup>16</sup> It was after that remarkable outpouring of God’s spirit in the first century that the preaching work began to go forward to the greatest extent. By the time the apostle Paul wrote his letter to the Colossians, about 61 C.E., he could describe the good news as being preached “in all creation under heaven.” (Col. 1:23) In Paul’s day, “all creation” meant the world as it was then known. With the help of Jehovah’s powerful holy spirit, the preaching work has expanded much more in our day—“to the ends of the earth”—Acts 13:47; see the box “I Will Pour Out My Spirit.”

#### WHAT HAS CHANGED?

<sup>17</sup> What has changed? We now have a more accurate understanding of the prophecy found at Joel 2:7-9. Simply

16. What effect did God’s spirit have on the preaching work in the first century, and what about today?

17. How has our understanding of Joel’s prophecy about the locusts changed?

put, these verses refer, not to our zealous preaching work, but to the activity of the Babylonian army that invaded Jerusalem in 607 B.C.E.

<sup>18</sup> What has not changed? Jehovah’s people continue to preach the good news everywhere, using every possible avenue to do so. (Matt. 24:14) No governmental restriction can prevent us from carrying out the commission to preach. And with Jehovah’s blessing, we are more active than ever, courageously preaching the good news of the Kingdom! We humbly continue to look to Jehovah for his guidance in understanding Bible prophecy, confident that when the time is right, he will lead us “into all the truth”—John 16:13.

18. What has not changed about Jehovah’s people?

**PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 4:** Joel’s prophecy predicted a military attack. The Revelation account foretold zealous preaching activity.

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#### CAN YOU EXPLAIN?

- Why may adjustments need to be made in our understanding of Bible prophecy?
- What does the prophecy at Joel 2:7-9 foretell?
- Why do you feel that adjustments to our understanding are faith-strengthening?

**SONG 64**

Sharing Joyfully  
in the Harvest

**PREVIEW**

How does the way we view our territory affect the way we preach and teach? This article examines how Jesus and the apostle Paul viewed their listeners and how we can imitate them by considering the beliefs, interests, and potential of those we meet.

## How Do You View the Fields?

*“Lift up your eyes and view the fields, that they are white for harvesting.”*—JOHN 4:35.

JESUS had been traveling through fields, likely of young green barley. (John 4:3-6) This crop would be ready to be harvested in about four months’ time. Jesus said something that must have sounded unusual: “Lift up your eyes and view the fields, that they are white for harvesting.” **(Read John 4:35, 36.)** What did he mean?

<sup>2</sup> Jesus was apparently referring to a figurative harvest of people. Consider what had just happened. Although Jews usually had no dealings with Samaritans, Jesus had preached to a Samaritan woman—and she had listened! In fact, while Jesus was speaking about fields that were “white for harvesting,” a crowd of Samaritans who had heard about Jesus from the woman were on their way to learn more from him. (John 4:9, 39-42) One Bible commentary says about this account: “The eagerness of the people . . . showed that they were like grain ready for harvesting.”

<sup>3</sup> What about the people to whom you preach the good news? Do you view them as being like grain that is ripe for harvesting? If so, three things will prove true. First, you will preach with more urgency. A harvest period is limited; there is no time to waste. Second, you will be happy as you see people respond to the good news. The Bible says: “People rejoice in the harvesttime.” (Isa. 9:3) And third,

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1-2. Why might Jesus have said the words found at John 4:35, 36?

3. If you view people as Jesus did, how will your preaching benefit?



you will see each person as a potential disciple, so you will adapt your approach to appeal to his or her interests.

<sup>4</sup> Jesus did not write off the Samaritans, as his followers may have done. Instead, he saw them as potential disciples. We too need to see the people in our territory as potential disciples of Christ. The apostle Paul set an outstanding example for us to follow. What can we learn from him? In this article, we will discuss how he (1) knew something about the beliefs of those to whom he preached, (2) discerned their interests, and (3) saw them as potential disciples of Jesus.

#### WHAT DO THEY BELIEVE?

<sup>5</sup> Paul preached often in Jewish synagogues. In the synagogue in Thessalonica, for example, “for three sabbaths he reasoned with [the Jews] from the Scriptures.” (Acts 17:1, 2) Paul likely felt comfortable in the synagogue. He was raised as a Jew. (Acts 26:4, 5) Paul could

4. What will we learn from the apostle Paul in this article?
5. Why could Paul relate to his audience in the synagogue?

relate to the Jews, so he was able to preach to them with confidence.—Phil. 3:4, 5.

<sup>6</sup> After Paul was forced by persecutors to flee Thessalonica and then Berea, he arrived in Athens. Once again, “he began to reason in the synagogue with the Jews and the other people who worshipped God.” (Acts 17:17) While preaching in the marketplace, however, Paul now had a different audience. Among his listeners were philosophers and other Gentiles who viewed Paul’s message as a “new teaching.” They said to him: “You are introducing some things that are strange to our ears.”—Acts 17:18-20.

<sup>7</sup> **Read Acts 17:22, 23.** Paul did not present his message to the Gentiles in Athens in the same way that he presented it to the Jews in the synagogue. Paul likely asked himself, ‘What do these people in Athens believe?’ He carefully observed his surroundings and took note

6. How were the people in the Athenian marketplace different from those to whom Paul preached in the synagogue?
7. According to Acts 17:22, 23, how did Paul adjust his approach?

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What should we do if we feel that our fields are “white for harvesting”?

(See paragraph 3)



Following the apostle Paul's example, be observant, adapt your presentation, and see people's potential

(See paragraphs 8, 12, 18)

of people's religious customs. Next, Paul searched for common ground between their form of worship and the truth in the Scriptures. "As a Jewish Christian, he realizes that pagan Greeks do not worship the 'true' God of Jews and Christians," says one Bible commentator, "but he tries to show that the God whom he proclaims is in reality no stranger to the Athenians." So Paul was willing to adapt his approach. He told the Athenians that his message came from the "Unknown God," whom they had been trying to worship. Although the Gentiles were not familiar with the Scriptures, Paul did not give up on them. Instead, he viewed them as being like grain that is ripe for harvesting, and he adjusted his presentation of the good news.

<sup>8</sup> Like Paul, **be observant**. Look for signs that indicate what beliefs people in your territory have. How has the householder decorated his home or vehicle? Does his name, dress, grooming, or even his vocabulary indicate what his religion is? Perhaps he has told you directly that he has his own religion. When that happens to a special pioneer named Flutura, she replies, "I'm here, not to impose my beliefs on you, but to talk to you about this subject . . ."

8. (a) How can you discern the religious beliefs of people in your territory? (b) If someone says that he has his own religion, how might you respond?



<sup>9</sup> What subjects might you discuss with a religious person? Try to find common ground. He may worship only one God, he may recognize Jesus as the Savior of humankind, or he may believe that we are living in a time of wickedness that will soon end. Based on beliefs you have in common, present the Bible's message in a way that is appealing to that person.

<sup>10</sup> Keep in mind that people may not believe everything that their religion teaches. So even after you discern a person's religion, try to find out what he personally believes. "Many now mix philosophy with their religious beliefs," says David, a special pioneer in Australia. Donalta, in Albania, says, "Some we meet say that they belong to a religion, but later they admit that they do not really believe in God." And a mis-

9. What common ground can you find with a religious person?

10. What should we try to do, and why?



sionary brother in Argentina notes that some people say that they believe in the Trinity, but they may not actually believe that the Father, the Son, and the holy spirit are one God. “Knowing that makes it much easier to find common ground with the person,” he says. So try to find out what people really believe. Then, like Paul, you can “become all things to people of all sorts.”—1 Cor. 9: 19-23.

#### WHAT ARE THEIR INTERESTS?

<sup>11</sup> **Read Acts 14:14-17.** Paul discerned the interests of his audience, and then he adapted his presentation. For example, the crowd he spoke to in Lystra had little or no knowledge of the Scriptures. So Paul used arguments that they could relate to. He spoke of fruitful harvests and the ability to enjoy life. He

11. As recorded at Acts 14:14-17, how did Paul in an appealing way present his message to the people who lived in Lystra?

used words and examples that his listeners could readily understand.

<sup>12</sup> Use insight to discern the interests of people in your territory and **adapt your presentation**. How can you find out what a person is interested in as you approach him or his home? Once again, be observant. Perhaps he is gardening, reading a book, repairing a vehicle, or engaging in some other activity. If appropriate, why not use what he is doing to engage him in conversation? (John 4:7) Even a person’s clothing may say something about him—perhaps it indicates his nationality, occupation, or favorite sports team. “I started a conversation with a 19-year-old man whose T-shirt depicted a famous singer,” says Gustavo. “I asked him about it, and the man told me why he identified with the singer. That conversation led to a

12. How can you discern a person’s interests and adapt your presentation?

Bible study, and now he is one of our brothers.”

<sup>13</sup> When you offer to study the Bible with someone, make it appealing to him; show him how a study will fill his needs. (John 4:13-15) A sister named Poppy, for example, was invited inside the home of a woman who showed interest. When Poppy saw a certificate on the wall indicating that the woman was a professor who had studied education, she stressed that we too educate people by means of our Bible study program and our meetings. The woman accepted a study, went to a meeting the next day, and attended a circuit assembly soon thereafter. One year later, she got baptized. Ask yourself: ‘What are my return visits interested in? Can I describe our Bible study program in a way that they would find appealing?’

<sup>14</sup> After you start a Bible study, prepare separately for each study you conduct, having in mind the background and interests of your student. As you prepare, decide what scriptures you will read, what videos you will show, and what illustrations you will use to explain Bible truths. Ask yourself, ‘What will especially appeal to and reach the heart of this student?’ (Prov. 16:23) In Albania, a woman who was studying with a pioneer named Flora stated firmly, “I cannot accept the teaching of the resurrection.” Flora did not force the issue. She relates, “I thought that she must first get to know the God who promises the resurrection.”

13. How might you offer a Bible study in an appealing way?

14. How can you tailor a Bible study to each student?

From that point on, at each study, Flora emphasized Jehovah’s love, wisdom, and power. Later, her student readily put faith in the resurrection. She is now a zealous Witness of Jehovah.

#### SEE THEM AS POTENTIAL DISCIPLES

<sup>15</sup> **Read Acts 17:16-18.** Paul did not give up on the Athenians, even though their city was filled with idolatry, sexual immorality, and pagan philosophy; nor did he let their insults discourage him. Paul himself became a Christian, although he had been “a blasphemer and a persecutor and an insolent man.” (1 Tim. 1:13) Just as Jesus saw the potential in Paul, so Paul saw the potential in the Athenians. And his confidence was not misplaced.—Acts 9:13-15; 17:34.

<sup>16</sup> In the first century, people of all backgrounds became Jesus’ disciples. When Paul wrote to Christians living in the Grecian city of Corinth, he said that some members of that congregation had at one time been criminals or had lived shockingly immoral lifestyles. And then he added: “That is what some of you were. But you have been washed clean.” (1 Cor. 6:9-11) Would you have seen that those people had the potential to change and become disciples?

<sup>17</sup> Today, many are willing to make the changes needed to become disciples of Jesus. In Australia, for example, a special pioneer named Yukina learned that all sorts of people can respond to the Bi-

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15. According to Acts 17:16-18, what behaviors in ancient Greece troubled Paul, but why did he not give up on the Athenians?

16-17. What shows that people of all backgrounds can become disciples of Christ? Give an example.



ble's message. Once, at a real estate office, she noticed a tattooed young woman wearing baggy clothes. "I hesitated for a moment," says Yukina, "but then I started talking to her. I discovered that she was so interested in the Bible that some of her tattoos were verses from the Psalms!" The woman began studying and attending the meetings.\*

<sup>18</sup> Did Jesus view the fields as being ripe for harvesting because he expected that most people would follow him? Not at all. The Scriptures had foretold that relatively few would put faith in him. (John 12:37, 38) And Jesus had the miraculous ability to read hearts. (Matt. 9:4) Still, he focused on those few who would believe, and he zealously preached to everyone. How much more so should we, who cannot read hearts, resist the tendency to judge a territory or an individual! Instead, *see people's potential*. Marc, a missionary in

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\* The series "The Bible Changes Lives" provides more examples of how people can change. This series appeared in *The Watchtower* until 2017. It now continues to be published on [jw.org](http://jw.org). Look under ABOUT US > EXPERIENCES.

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18. Why should we not judge people?

Burkina Faso, puts it this way: "The people I think will make progress often stop studying. But the people I think won't go far progress very well. So I have learned that it is better to let Jehovah's spirit lead us."

<sup>19</sup> At first glance, it may appear that there are not many in the territory who are like grain that is ripe for harvesting. But remember what Jesus said to his disciples. The fields are white, that is, they are ready to be harvested. People can change and become disciples of Christ. Jehovah views these potential disciples as "precious things." (Hag. 2:7) If we see people as Jehovah and Jesus do, we will learn about their backgrounds and interests. We will view them, not as strangers, but as potential brothers and sisters.

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19. How should we view people in our territory?

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**PICTURE DESCRIPTION Pages 10-11:** As a couple work from door to door in the ministry, they observe (1) a well-kept home, decorated with flowers; (2) a home where a young family lives; (3) a home that is unkempt inside and out; and (4) a religious household. Where will you find the person with the most potential?

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## HOW CAN YOU IMITATE THE WAY PAUL . . .

- adapted his message to the religious beliefs of his listeners?
- appealed to the interests of his listeners?
- saw the potential in those to whom he preached?



**SONG 101**

Working Together in Unity

**PREVIEW**

As imperfect humans, we have a tendency to make quick assumptions about people and their motives. Jehovah, on the other hand, “sees into the heart.” (1 Sam. 16:7) This article will discuss how he lovingly helped Jonah, Elijah, Hagar, and Lot. And it will help us to imitate Jehovah in the way we deal with our brothers and sisters.

## Listen, Learn, and Show Compassion

*“Stop judging by the outward appearance, but judge with righteous judgment.”—JOHN 7:24.*

WOULD you like people to judge you based on the color of your skin, the shape of your face, or the size of your body? Likely, you would not. How comforting it is to know, then, that Jehovah does not judge us by what human eyes can see! For example, when Samuel looked at the sons of Jesse, he did not see what Jehovah saw. Jehovah had told Samuel that one of Jesse’s sons would become king of Israel. But which one? When Samuel saw Jesse’s oldest son, Eliab, he said: “Surely here before Jehovah stands his anointed one.” Eliab looked like a king. “But Jehovah said to Samuel: ‘Do not pay attention to his appearance and how tall he is, for I have rejected him.’” The lesson? Jehovah continued: “Man sees what appears to the eyes, but Jehovah sees into the heart.” —1 Sam. 16:1, 6, 7.

<sup>2</sup> As imperfect humans, all of us have a tendency to judge others by their outward appearance. (**Read John 7:24.**) But we learn only a little about a person from what we see with our eyes. To illustrate, even a brilliant and experienced doctor can learn only so much by just looking at a patient. He must listen attentively if he is to learn about the patient’s medical history, his emotional make-up, or any symptoms he is having. The doctor may even order an X-ray to see the inside of the patient’s body. Otherwise, the doctor could misdiagnose the problem. Similarly, we cannot fully understand our brothers and sisters by simply looking at their outward appearance.

1. The Bible reveals what comforting truth about Jehovah?
2. As indicated at John 7:24, why should we not judge a person by his appearance? Illustrate.

We must try to look beneath the surface—at the inner person. Of course, we cannot read hearts, so we will never understand others as well as Jehovah does. But we can do our best to imitate Jehovah. How?

<sup>3</sup> How does Jehovah deal with his worshippers? He *listens* to them. He *takes into account* their background and situation. And he *shows compassion* for them. As we consider how Jehovah did that for Jonah, Elijah, Hagar, and Lot, let us see how we can imitate Jehovah when dealing with our brothers and sisters.

#### LISTEN ATTENTIVELY

<sup>4</sup> From our limited viewpoint, we could judge Jonah as unreliable, even disloyal. He received a direct command from Jehovah to proclaim judgment in Nineveh. But instead of obeying, Jonah boarded a ship traveling in the opposite direction, “away from Jehovah.” (Jonah 1:1-3) Would you have given Jonah another chance to handle the assignment?

3. How will the Bible accounts in this article help us to imitate Jehovah?
4. Why might we view Jonah negatively?

Possibly not. Yet, Jehovah saw reasons to do so.—Jonah 3:1, 2.

<sup>5</sup> Jonah revealed the type of person he really was in his prayer. (**Read Jonah 2:1, 2, 9.**) That prayer—doubtless one of many Jonah offered—helps us to see him as far more than a man who ran away from an assignment. His words show that he was humble, thankful, and determined to obey Jehovah. No wonder Jehovah looked beyond Jonah’s actions, responded to his prayer, and continued to use him as a prophet!

<sup>6</sup> To *listen attentively to others*, we need to be humble and patient. It is worth the effort for at least three reasons. First, we will be less likely to jump to wrong conclusions about people. Second, we can discern feelings and motives in our brother, and that will help us to be more empathetic. And third, we may help the person to learn something about himself. Sometimes we do not really understand even our own

5. What do you learn about Jonah from his words recorded at Jonah 2:1, 2, 9?
6. Why is it worth the effort for us to listen attentively?

If we get the facts,  
we can be more  
empathetic  
(See paragraph 6)



emotions until we express those emotions in words. (Prov. 20:5) An elder in Asia admits: “I remember making the mistake of speaking before listening. I told a sister that she needed to improve the quality of her comments at the meeting. Later, I learned that she has difficulty reading and that it takes a lot of effort for her to give comments.” How important it is that each elder “hears the facts” before giving counsel!—Prov. 18:13.

<sup>7</sup> Some of our brothers and sisters find it difficult to talk about their feelings because of their background, culture, or personality. How can we make it easier for them to open their hearts to us? Remember the way Jehovah dealt with Elijah when he fled from Jezebel. It took many days before Elijah expressed himself completely to his heavenly Father. Jehovah listened attentively. He then encouraged Elijah and gave him constructive work to do. (1 Ki. 19:1-18) It may take time for our brothers and sisters to feel comfortable speaking to us, but only when they do will we be able to discern their true feelings. If we imitate Jehovah by being patient, we can earn their confidence. Then, when they are ready to share their feelings, we should listen attentively.

#### GET TO KNOW YOUR BROTHERS AND SISTERS

<sup>8</sup> Hagar, the maidservant of Sarai, acted foolishly after she was given as a wife to Abram. Hagar became pregnant

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7. What do you learn from the way Jehovah dealt with Elijah?

8. According to Genesis 16:7-13, how did Jehovah help Hagar?

and then began to look down on Sarai, who had no children of her own. The situation became so bad that Sarai chased Hagar away. (Gen. 16:4-6) From our imperfect viewpoint, Hagar might appear to be no more than a spiteful woman who got what she deserved. But Jehovah saw more in Hagar. He sent his angel to her. When the angel found her, he helped her to adjust her attitude and blessed her. Hagar sensed that Jehovah had been watching her and knew all about her situation. She was moved to call him “a God of sight, . . . the one who sees me.”—**Read Genesis 16:7-13.**

<sup>9</sup> What did Jehovah see in Hagar? He was fully aware of her background and everything she had been through. (Prov. 15:3) Hagar was an Egyptian living in a Hebrew household. Did she sometimes feel like an outsider? Did she miss her family and her homeland? She was not Abram’s only wife. For a time, some faithful men had more than one wife. But that was not Jehovah’s original purpose. (Matt. 19:4-6) It is no surprise, then, that such an arrangement caused jealousy and resentment. While Jehovah did not excuse Hagar’s disrespect for Sarai, we can be sure that he took Hagar’s background and her situation into account.

<sup>10</sup> We can imitate Jehovah by trying to understand one another. *Get to know your brothers and sisters* better. Talk with them before and after meetings, work with them in the ministry, and if

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9. What did God take into account when he dealt with Hagar?

10. How can we get to know our brothers and sisters better?



Get to know  
your brothers  
and sisters better  
(See paragraphs 10-12)

possible, invite them for a meal. When you do, you may learn that a sister who seems unfriendly is actually shy, a brother whom you thought to be materialistic is hospitable, or a family that often comes late to the meetings is enduring opposition. (Job 6:29) Of course, we should not become “meddlers in other people’s affairs.” (1 Tim. 5:13) However, it is good to know something about our brothers and sisters and the circumstances that have shaped their personality.

<sup>11</sup> Elders in particular need to know the background of brothers and sisters under their care. Consider the example of a brother named Artur who was serving as a circuit overseer. He and another elder visited a sister who seemed shy and withdrawn. “We learned that her husband died soon after they got married,” Artur says. “Despite the challenges, she raised two spiritually strong daughters. Now, though, her eyesight was failing, and she suffered from depression. Even so, her love for Jehovah and her faith in him re-

mained strong. We realized that we had a lot to learn from this sister’s good example.” (Phil. 2:3) This circuit overseer was following Jehovah’s example. Jehovah knows his sheep and the pain they suffer. (Ex. 3:7) Elders who know the sheep well are in a better position to help them.

<sup>12</sup> When you get to know the background of a fellow Christian whom you find irritating, you are more likely to feel empathy for that one. Consider an example. “A sister in my congregation was very loud when she spoke,” says Yip Yee, who lives in Asia. “I felt that she lacked good manners. But when I worked with her in the ministry, I learned that she used to help her parents sell fish in a market. She had to speak loudly to attract customers.” Yip Yee adds: “I learned that to understand my brothers and sisters, I need to know their background.” It takes effort to get to know your brothers better. Still, when you follow the Bible’s counsel to open your heart wide, you imitate Jehovah,

11. Why is it important for elders to know the sheep well?

12. How did a sister named Yip Yee benefit from getting to know a sister in the congregation?



who loves “all sorts of people.”—1 Tim. 2:3, 4; 2 Cor. 6:11-13.

### SHOW COMPASSION

<sup>13</sup> At a critical time in his life, Lot was slow to obey Jehovah’s instructions. Two angels visited Lot and told him to bring his family out of Sodom. Why? They said: “We are going to destroy this place.” (Gen. 19:12, 13) The next morning, Lot and his family were still at home. So the angels again warned Lot. But “he kept lingering.” We may judge Lot as being apathetic, even disobedient. However, Jehovah did not give up on him. “Because of Jehovah’s compassion for him,” the angels took the family by the hand and led them outside the city.—**Read Genesis 19:15, 16.**

<sup>14</sup> Jehovah might have felt compassion

13. As recorded at Genesis 19:15, 16, what did the angels do when Lot kept lingering, and why?

14. Why might Jehovah have felt compassion for Lot?

for Lot for a number of reasons. Lot may have been reluctant to leave his home because he feared the people outside the city. There were other dangers too. Lot likely knew of the two kings who had fallen into pits of bitumen, or asphalt, in a nearby valley. (Gen. 14:8-12) As a husband and father, Lot must have worried about his family. In addition, Lot was wealthy, so he may have owned a fine house in Sodom. (Gen. 13:5, 6) Of course, none of those factors excused Lot for failing to obey Jehovah immediately. However, Jehovah looked beyond Lot’s mistake and viewed him as a “righteous man.”—2 Pet. 2:7, 8.

<sup>15</sup> Rather than judge another person’s actions, do your best to understand how he feels. Veronica, a sister in Europe, tried to do that. “One sister always seemed to be in a bad mood,” she relates. “She kept isolating herself

15. Rather than judge a person’s actions, what should we do?

By listening, we may come to understand how we can show compassion (See paragraphs 15-16)





from others. Sometimes, I was afraid to approach her. But I thought, ‘If I were in her situation, I would need a friend.’ So I decided to ask her how she was feeling. And she started to open up her heart! Now I understand a lot more about her.”

<sup>16</sup> The only person who fully understands us is Jehovah. (Prov. 15:11) So ask him to help you to see in others what he sees and to **understand how to show compassion** for them. Prayer helped a sister named Anzhela to be more empathetic. A sister in her congregation had become difficult to get along with. Anzhela admits: “It would have been very easy to fall into the trap of criticizing the sister and to ‘wash my hands’ of her. But then I asked Jehovah to help me empathize with this sister.” Did Jehovah answer Anzhela’s prayer? She continues: “We went in the ministry together and talked afterward for hours. I listened to her with compassion. Now I have more love for her, and I’m determined to help her.”

16. Why should we pray for help to cultivate empathy?

<sup>17</sup> You cannot pick which brothers and sisters deserve your tender compassion. All of them face problems as did Jonah, Elijah, Hagar, and Lot. In a number of cases, they have brought the problems on themselves. Realistically, all of us have done that at some point. It is reasonable, then, for Jehovah to ask us to show fellow feeling for one another. (1 Pet. 3:8) When we obey Jehovah, we add to the unity of our remarkable and diverse global family. So when dealing with one another, may we be determined to listen, learn, and show compassion.

17. What should we be determined to do?

**PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 15:** An older brother is disturbed by a younger brother’s late arrival at the meeting but later finds out that he was late because he was in an auto accident.

**Page 17:** Although the service group overseer at first thought that a sister was a loner and aloof, he later learned that she was just shy and uncomfortable around people she did not know well.

**Page 18:** When a sister got to know another sister better socially, she realized that the sister was not moody and uncaring as she had originally thought when they first met at the Kingdom Hall.

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## HOW CAN WE IMITATE THE WAY JEHOVAH . . .

- listened attentively to Jonah and Elijah?
- took Hagar’s circumstances into consideration?
- showed compassion for Lot?

**SONG 13**

Christ, Our Model

**PREVIEW**

The apostles spent some years talking and working with Jesus, and they became good friends. Jesus also wants us to be his friends, but we face challenges that the apostles did not have to overcome. This article will discuss some of those challenges and provide suggestions on how we can build and maintain a close friendship with Jesus.

## “I Have Called You Friends”

*“I have called you friends, because I have made known to you all the things I have heard from my Father.”—JOHN 15:15.*

USUALLY, the first step in building a close friendship with someone you meet is to spend time with the person. As you talk to each other, sharing thoughts and experiences, you become friends. When it comes to building a close friendship with Jesus, however, we face challenges. What are some of them?

<sup>2</sup> The first challenge is that ***we have not met Jesus personally***. Many Christians in the first century faced the same challenge. Even so, the apostle Peter observed: “Though you never saw him, you love him. Though you do not see him now, yet you exercise faith in him.” (1 Pet. 1:8) So it is possible to form a close relationship with Jesus without having met him personally.

<sup>3</sup> The second challenge is that ***we are not able to speak to Jesus***. When we pray, we direct our thoughts to Jehovah. True, we do pray in Jesus’ name, but we do not talk directly to him. In fact, Jesus does not want us to pray to him. Why not? Because prayer is a form of worship, and only Jehovah should be worshipped. (Matt. 4:10) Even so, we can express our love for Jesus.

1. How do you build a close friendship with someone?
2. What is the first challenge we face?
3. What is the second challenge we face?

<sup>4</sup> The third challenge is that *Jesus lives in heaven*, so we cannot literally spend time with him. But we can still get to know a lot about Jesus without being physically near him. We will review four things we can do that will strengthen our friendship with him. First, though, let us examine why it is vital for us to build a close friendship with Christ.

#### WHY DO WE NEED TO BECOME JESUS' FRIENDS?

<sup>5</sup> We must be friends with Jesus if we are *to have a good relationship with Jehovah*. Why is that true? Consider just two reasons. First, Jesus told his disciples: “The Father himself has affection for you, *because* you have had affection for me.” (John 16:27) He also said: “No one comes to the Father except through me.” (John 14:6) Trying to be Jehovah’s friend without building a close bond with Jesus is like trying to enter a building without using the door. Jesus used a similar illustration when he described himself as “the door for the sheep.” (John 10:7) A second reason is that Jesus perfectly reflected his Father’s qualities. He said to his disciples: “Whoever has seen me has seen the Father also.” (John 14:9) So an important way that we come to know Jehovah is by studying the life of Jesus. As we learn about Jesus, our affection for him will grow. And as our friendship with Jesus grows, our love for his Father will deepen.


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4. What is the third challenge, and what will we discuss in this article?

5. Why must we be friends with Jesus? (See also the boxes “Friendship With Jesus Leads to Friendship With Jehovah” and “A Balanced View of Jesus’ Role.”)

## Friendship With Jesus Leads to Friendship With Jehovah

Because of inherited sin, we could never on our own enjoy friendship with Jehovah. All of us begin life, not as God’s friends, but as his enemies. To become his friends, therefore, we must be reconciled to him. (Rom. 5:6-12) Jehovah has made provision for this reconciliation through the ransom sacrifice of his only-begotten Son. By exercising faith in Jesus and obeying his commands, we can become his friends. (John 3:16, 36; 15:14) More significantly, though, by exercising faith in Jesus, we can become reconciled to God. Thus, friendship with Jesus leads to friendship with Jehovah.



### A Balanced View of Jesus’ Role

Like those in Christendom, the early Bible Students mistakenly allowed their love for Jesus to overshadow their relationship with Jehovah. Beginning in 1919, however, they came to see that Jehovah and their relationship with him should be the focus of their worship. We can be thankful that we understand that our affection for Jesus is key to having a relationship with Jehovah. We must attach neither too much nor too little importance to our love for Jesus.—John 16:27.

<sup>6</sup> We must have a relationship with Jesus *in order for our prayers to be answered*. This calls for doing more than simply adding the phrase “in Jesus’ name” to our prayers as a formality. We must recognize how Jehovah uses Jesus in answering our prayers. Jesus told the apostles: “Whatever you ask in my name, *I will do this*.” (John 14:13) Although Jehovah is the one who hears and answers our prayers, he has given Jesus the authority to carry out His decisions. (Matt. 28:18) Thus, before God answers our prayers, he sees if we have applied the counsel Jesus gave. For example, Jesus said: “If you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you; whereas if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (Matt. 6:14, 15) How important it is, then, that we treat others in the same kind way that Jehovah and Jesus treat us!

<sup>7</sup> Only those who have a close friendship with Jesus will *benefit from his ransom sacrifice*. How do we know? Jesus said that he would “surrender his life in behalf of his friends.” (John 15:13) Faithful people who lived before Jesus came to earth will have to learn about him and come to love him. Such men and women as Abraham, Sarah, Moses, and Rahab will be resurrected, but even these righteous servants of Jehovah will need to form a friendship with Jesus in order to gain everlasting life.

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6. What is another reason why we must have a relationship with Jesus? Explain.

7. Who benefit from Jesus’ ransom sacrifice?

—John 17:3; Acts 24:15; Heb. 11:8-12, 24-26, 31.

<sup>8</sup> We have the joy of working along with Jesus in preaching and teaching the good news of the Kingdom. When Jesus was on earth, he was a teacher. And since his return to heaven, Jesus, as head of the congregation, has continued to direct the preaching and teaching work. He sees and appreciates your efforts to help as many as you can to come to know him and his Father. In fact, the only way we can accomplish this work is with the help of Jehovah and Jesus. —**Read John 15:4, 5.**

<sup>9</sup> God’s Word clearly teaches that we must have and maintain love for Jesus in order to please Jehovah. So let us consider four things we can do to become Jesus’ friends.

#### HOW TO BUILD A FRIENDSHIP WITH JESUS

<sup>10</sup> (1) *Get to know Jesus*. We can do this by reading the Bible books of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. As we meditate on the Bible accounts of Jesus’ life, we come to love and respect Jesus because of the kind way he dealt with people. For instance, even though he was their Master, he did not treat his disciples as slaves. Instead, he revealed his inner thoughts and feelings to them. (John 15:15) Jesus shared their pain and cried with them. (John 11:32-36) Even his opposers acknowledged that he was a

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8-9. As explained at John 15:4, 5, what does our relationship with Jesus enable us to do, and why is that important?

10. What is the first step to our building a friendship with Jesus?

You can become Jesus' friend by (1) getting to know him better, (2) imitating his way of thinking and acting, (3) supporting Christ's brothers, and (4) supporting the arrangements of the congregation  
(See paragraphs 10-14)



1



2



3



4



friend of those who responded to his message. (Matt. 11:19) When we imitate Jesus in the way that he dealt with his disciples, our relationships with others improve, we feel more content and happy, and our appreciation for Christ grows.

<sup>11</sup> **(2) Imitate Jesus' way of thinking and acting.** The better we know and imitate his way of thinking, the closer our friendship with him will be. (1 Cor. 2:16) How can we imitate Jesus? Note just one example. Jesus thought more about helping others than about pleasing himself. (Matt. 20:28; Rom. 15:1-3) Because he had this mental attitude, he was self-sacrificing and forgiving. He did not easily become offended at what people said about him. (John 1:46, 47) And he did not freeze people in time by holding their past mistakes against them permanently. (1 Tim. 1:12-14) Jesus said: "All will know that you are my disciples—if you have love among yourselves." (John 13:35) Why not ask yourself, "Am I following Jesus' example by doing everything in my power to maintain peace with my brothers and sisters?"

<sup>12</sup> **(3) Support Christ's brothers.** Jesus views what we do for his anointed brothers as if we were doing it for him. (Matt. 25:34-40) The primary way that we support the anointed is by sharing fully in the Kingdom-preaching and disciple-making work that Jesus directed his followers to carry out. (Matt. 28:19, 20; Acts 10:42) Only with the help of the

"other sheep" can Christ's brothers accomplish the great worldwide preaching campaign now taking place. (John 10:16) If you are of the other sheep, each time you share in this work, you show your loving attachment not only to the anointed but also to Jesus.

<sup>13</sup> We also make friends with Jehovah and Jesus by using our financial resources to support the work that they are directing. **(Read Luke 16:9.)** For example, we can contribute toward the worldwide work, which includes financing the preaching of the good news in isolated areas, building and maintaining facilities that support true worship, and providing material relief for those who have suffered loss. We can also support our own congregation financially and help those whom we personally know to be in need. (Prov. 19:17) These are ways that we can support Christ's brothers.

<sup>14</sup> **(4) Support the arrangements of the Christian congregation.** We strengthen our connection to Jesus as the head of the congregation when we cooperate with those who are appointed to care for us. **(Read Ephesians 4:15, 16.)** For example, we are now trying to make sure that all Kingdom Halls are used to full capacity. To that end, some congregations have been merged with other congregations and territory boundaries have been adjusted. This arrangement has resulted in considerable savings of dedicated resources. At the same time, however, it has required that some pub-

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11. What is the second step toward becoming Jesus' friend, and why is that step important?

12. What is the third step toward becoming Jesus' friend, and how can we take that step?

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13. How can we apply Jesus' counsel recorded at Luke 16:9?

14. As shown at Ephesians 4:15, 16, what is the fourth step toward becoming Jesus' friend?

lishers adjust to the new circumstances. Those faithful publishers may have served with a certain congregation for many years and may have grown close to the brothers and sisters there. But now they are being asked to serve in a different congregation. How pleased Jesus must be to see these loyal disciples cooperate with this arrangement!

#### FRIENDS OF JESUS FOREVER

<sup>15</sup> Those who are anointed with holy spirit have the hope of being with Jesus forever, serving as joint heirs of God's Kingdom. They will actually be with Christ—see him, speak with him, and spend time in his company. (John 14:2, 3) Those with the earthly hope will also receive Jesus' love and attention. Even though they will not see Jesus, their bond with him will grow ever stronger as they enjoy the life that Jeho-

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15. How will our friendship with Jesus improve in the future?

vah and Jesus make possible for them.—Isa. 9:6, 7.

<sup>16</sup> When we accept Jesus' invitation to become his friends, we gain many blessings. For example, we benefit from his love and support right now. We are given the opportunity to live forever. And most important, our friendship with Jesus will lead us to the finest treasure of all—a close, personal relationship with Jesus' Father, Jehovah. What a privilege we have to be called Jesus' friends!

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16. What blessings do we gain from our friendship with Jesus?

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**PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS Page 23:** (1) During family worship, we can study about Jesus' life and ministry. (2) In the congregation, we can pursue peace with our brothers. (3) By engaging fully in the ministry, we can support Christ's brothers. (4) When congregations are merged, we can cooperate with the decisions of the elders.

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#### HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- Why might it be a challenge to be friends with Jesus?
- Why do we need to be friends with Jesus?
- What steps can we take to build our friendship with Jesus?

**SONG 129**

We Will Keep Enduring

**PREVIEW**

Many of Jehovah's servants today suffer the effects of advancing age; a number are dealing with a debilitating illness. And all of us feel tired at times. So the idea of running in a race may seem intimidating. This article discusses how all of us can run with endurance and win the race for life that the apostle Paul spoke about.

## “Run the Race to the Finish”

*“I have run the race to the finish.”*—2 TIM. 4:7.

WOULD you want to run in a race that you know is difficult, especially if you feel sick or tired? Likely not. The apostle Paul, however, said that all true Christians are in a race. (Heb. 12:1) And all of us, young or old, energetic or tired, must endure to the end if we want to receive the prize that Jehovah offers us.—Matt. 24:13.

<sup>2</sup> Paul had freeness of speech because he had successfully “run the race to the finish.” (**Read 2 Timothy 4: 7, 8.**) But what, specifically, is the race that Paul spoke about?

### WHAT IS THE RACE?

<sup>3</sup> Paul sometimes used features from the games held in ancient Greece to teach important lessons. (1 Cor. 9:25-27; 2 Tim. 2:5) On a number of occasions, he used running as in a footrace to illustrate the Christian course of life. (1 Cor. 9:24; Gal. 2:2; Phil. 2:16) A person enters this “race” when he dedicates himself to Jehovah and gets baptized. (1 Pet. 3:21) He crosses the finish line when Jehovah grants him the prize of everlasting life.—Matt. 25:31-34, 46; 2 Tim. 4:8.

<sup>4</sup> What are some of the similarities between running a long-distance footrace and living a Christian life? There are a number of parallels. Let us consider three of them. First, we need to follow the right course; second, we

1. What must all of us do?
2. As recorded at 2 Timothy 4:7, 8, why did Paul have freeness of speech?
3. What is the race that Paul spoke about?
4. What will we consider in this article?



All of us must follow the Christian course of life  
(See paragraphs 5-7)

must focus on the finish line; and third, we have to overcome challenges along the way.

#### FOLLOW THE RIGHT COURSE

<sup>5</sup> To qualify for the prize in a literal race, the runners must follow the course laid out by the organizers of the event. Similarly, if we want to receive the prize of everlasting life, we must follow the Christian course, or way of life. (Acts 20:24; 1 Pet. 2:21) However, Satan and those who follow his example want us to make a different choice; they want us to “continue running with them.” (1 Pet. 4:4) They ridicule the course of life we follow and claim that the path they are on is better, that it leads to freedom. But their claim is false.—2 Pet. 2:19.

<sup>6</sup> Any who run with those influenced by Satan’s world soon discover that the path they have chosen does not lead to freedom; it leads to slavery. (Rom. 6:16) Consider the example of Brian. His parents encouraged him to follow the Christian course of life. But when he was in his teens, he questioned whether that path would make him happy. Brian

decided to run with those who lived by Satan’s standards. “Little did I realize that the so-called freedom I desired would lead me into the clutches of addiction,” he says. “In time, I was abusing drugs and alcohol and living immorally. Over the next several years, I progressively experimented with harder drugs and became a slave to many of them. . . . I began selling drugs to support my lifestyle.” Eventually, Brian decided to live by Jehovah’s standards. He changed paths and got baptized in 2001. He is genuinely happy now that he is following the Christian course of life.\*

<sup>7</sup> How important it is that we choose the right road to follow! Satan wants all of us to stop running on the cramped road that is “leading off into life” and cross over to the spacious road that most people in this world are on. That road is popular and is easier to travel. But it is “leading off into destruction.” **(Read Matthew 7:13, 14.)** To remain on the right road and not be sidetracked, we must trust in Jehovah and listen to him.

\* See the article “The Bible Changes Lives” in the January 1, 2013, issue of *The Watchtower*.

5. What course must we follow, and why?
6. What do you learn from the example of Brian?

7. According to Matthew 7:13, 14, what two roads are set before us?

## STAY FOCUSED AND AVOID STUMBLING

<sup>8</sup> The contestants in a long-distance race keep an eye on the road immediately in front of them so that they do not stumble. However, they might still accidentally be tripped by a fellow runner or step into a pothole. If they do fall down, they get back up and keep on running. They focus primarily, not on what made them stumble, but on the finish line and the prize they hope to win.

<sup>9</sup> In our race, we may stumble many times, making mistakes in what we say or do. Or our fellow runners may make mistakes that hurt us. That is to be expected. We are all imperfect, and we are all running on the same cramped road to life. So we are bound to “bump” against one another at times. Paul acknowledged that we at times would give one another “cause for complaint.” (Col. 3:13) But rather than focus on what made us stum-

ble, let us focus on the prize ahead. If we do stumble, let us choose to get back up and keep on running. If we become bitter and resentful and refuse to get back up, we will not cross the finish line and receive the prize. In addition, we are likely to become an obstacle for others who are trying to run on the cramped road to life.

<sup>10</sup> Another way we can avoid becoming “a stumbling block” to our fellow runners is by yielding to their preferences whenever possible instead of insisting on our rights. (Rom. 14:13, 19-21; 1 Cor. 8:9, 13) In this important way, we are not like the runners in a literal race. They compete against the other runners, and each runner strives to gain the prize just for himself. Those runners think primarily about their own interests. So they may try to push their way to the front of the pack. By contrast, we are not competing against one another. (Gal. 5:26; 6:4) Our goal is to help as many as possi-

8. If a runner stumbles, what does he do?

9. If we stumble, what should we do?

10. How can we avoid becoming “a stumbling block” to others?



We have to stay focused  
and avoid stumbling others  
(See paragraphs 8-12)



ble to cross the finish line with us and gain the prize of life. So we try to apply Paul's inspired counsel to "look out not only for [our] own interests, but also for the interests of others."—Phil. 2:4.

<sup>11</sup> In addition to looking at the road immediately in front of them, the runners in a literal race focus on the finish line. Even if they cannot see that line with their literal eyes, they can imagine themselves crossing it and receiving the prize. They stay motivated by keeping the prize clearly in mind.

<sup>12</sup> In the race that we run, Jehovah has kindly offered his people a guaranteed reward for completing the race—everlasting life either in heaven or on a paradise earth. The Scriptures provide previews of this reward, so that we can imagine how wonderful our life will be. The more we keep the hope alive in our mind and heart, the less likely we are to allow anything to stumble us permanently.

### KEEP RUNNING DESPITE CHALLENGES

<sup>13</sup> The runners in the Greek games had to overcome challenges, such as tiredness and pain. But all they had to rely on was their training and their own strength. We are like those runners in that we receive training in how to run the race we are in. But we have an advantage over the literal runners. We can draw on an unlimited source of power. If we rely on Jehovah, he promises

11. What does a runner focus on, and why?
12. What has Jehovah kindly offered us?
13. What advantage do we have over literal runners?

not only to train us but also to make us strong!—1 Pet. 5:10.

<sup>14</sup> Paul had to deal with many challenges. In addition to being insulted and persecuted by others, he at times felt weak and he had to cope with what he called "a thorn in the flesh." (2 Cor. 12:7) But rather than view those challenges as a reason for giving up, he saw them as an opportunity to rely on Jehovah. **(Read 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10.)** Because Paul adopted this viewpoint, Jehovah helped him through all his trials.

<sup>15</sup> We too may be insulted or persecuted for our faith. We may also have to cope with poor health or exhaustion. But if we imitate Paul, each of those challenges can become an opportunity to experience Jehovah's loving support.

<sup>16</sup> Are you lying in a bed or sitting in a wheelchair? Do you have weak knees or poor eyesight? If so, can you run along with those who are young and healthy? You certainly can! Many older and infirm ones are running on the road to life. They cannot do this work in their own power. Instead, they draw on Jehovah's strength by listening to Christian meetings over a telephone tie-line or watching meetings through video streaming. And they engage in the disciple-making work by witnessing to doctors, nurses, and relatives.

<sup>17</sup> Never let discouragement over your physical limitations convince you that

14. How does 2 Corinthians 12:9, 10 help us to face challenges?
15. If we imitate Paul, what will we experience?
16. Even if you are infirm, what can you do?
17. How does Jehovah feel about those with physical limitations?



We want to keep running in the race for life despite our personal challenges  
(See paragraphs 13-20)

you are too weak to run on the road to life. Jehovah loves you for your faith in him and your record of endurance. You need his help now more than ever, and he will not abandon you. (Ps. 9:10) Instead, he will draw even closer to you. Note the comments of a sister who deals with some challenging medical conditions: “As health issues continue to mount, I find that the opportunities to share the truth with others become less frequent. But I know that even my small efforts bring joy to Jehovah’s heart, and that makes me happy.” When you feel low, remember that you are not alone. Think of the example set by Paul, and recall his encouraging words: “I take pleasure in weaknesses, . . . for when I am weak, then I am powerful.”—2 Cor. 12:10.

<sup>18</sup> Some who are running on the road to life face another challenge. They are dealing with personal circumstances that others cannot see and may not understand. For example, they have to cope with depression or overwhelming feelings of anxiety. Why do these dear servants of Jehovah face an especially

difficult challenge? Because when a person has a broken arm or is confined to a wheelchair, everyone can see the problem he or she faces and may feel moved to help. However, those who must cope with an emotional or a mental disorder may not show any outward signs of suffering. Their distress is just as real as is the distress of someone with a broken limb, but they may not receive the same compassionate response from others.

<sup>19</sup> If you live with limitations and feel that you are misunderstood, you may be able to draw strength from the example of Mephibosheth. (2 Sam. 4:4) He had to deal with being infirm, and he was misjudged by King David. Mephibosheth did nothing to bring these trials on himself. Yet, he did not allow himself to become negative; he appreciated the positive things in his life. He was thankful for the kindness David had shown him in the past. (2 Sam. 9:6-10) So when David misjudged him, Mephibosheth saw the complete picture. He did not allow David’s mistake to make him bitter. And he did not blame Jehovah for what David had done. Mephibosheth focused on

18. What especially difficult challenge do some face?

19. What do we learn from the example of Mephibosheth?

what he could do to support Jehovah's appointed king. (2 Sam. 16:1-4; 19:24-30) Jehovah had Mephibosheth's excellent example recorded in His Word for our benefit.—Rom. 15:4.

<sup>20</sup> Because of severe anxiety, some brothers and sisters feel very nervous and self-conscious in everyday social situations. They may find it difficult to be in large groups, but they continue to attend congregation meetings, assemblies, and conventions. They find it a challenge to speak to strangers, yet they talk to others in the field ministry. If that is true in your case, be assured that you are not alone. Many deal with similar struggles. Remember that Jehovah is pleased with your whole-souled efforts. The fact that you have not given up is proof that he is blessing you and giving you the strength you need.\* (Phil. 4:6, 7; 1 Pet. 5:7) If you are serving Jehovah

\* For additional practical suggestions about dealing with anxiety as well as experiences of those who are successfully dealing with it, see the May 2019 program on [jw.org](http://jw.org). Look under LIBRARY > JW BROADCASTING®.

20. How may anxiety affect some, but of what can they be confident?

despite enduring physical or emotional limitations, you can be confident that you are pleasing Jehovah.

<sup>21</sup> Thankfully, there are differences between a literal race and the one Paul talks about. In a literal footrace in Bible times, only one person won the prize. By contrast, everyone who endures faithfully in the Christian course of life receives the prize of everlasting life. (John 3:16) And in the literal race, all the runners had to be physically fit; otherwise, they had little chance of winning. On the other hand, many of us have physical limitations, yet we are enduring. (2 Cor. 4:16) With Jehovah's help, we will all run the race to the finish!

21. With Jehovah's help, what will all of us be able to do?

**PICTURE DESCRIPTIONS** **Page 27:** Staying busy in the ministry keeps this older brother on the right Christian course. **Page 28:** We could stumble others either by insisting that they drink more alcohol or by not limiting our own use of it. **Page 30:** Even when bedridden in a hospital, a brother stays in the Christian race by witnessing to his caregivers.

## HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

- What is the race that Paul spoke about?
- What challenges do we face?
- How can we endure?

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Brother J. F. Rutherford and other anointed servants who took the lead boldly proclaimed God's judgments against this wicked system of things (See study article 14, paragraph 8)

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