

MARCH 2018

THE WATCHTOWER

ANNOUNCING JEHOVAH'S KINGDOM



STUDY ARTICLES FOR:
APRIL 30–JUNE 3, 2018



COVER IMAGE:
CROATIA

Two brothers offer a tract to a painter on the bridge in front of Kaštilac, a fortress built in the 16th century, near the city of Split

PUBLISHERS
5,335

BIBLE STUDIES
2,123

MEMORIAL ATTENDANCE (2016)
8,434

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**THE WATCHTOWER®**
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Baptism—A Requirement for Christians

“Baptism . . . is also now saving you.”—1 PET. 3:21.

AS HER Christian parents looked on, a young girl, whom we will call Maria, stood up with the other baptism candidates. In a loud, clear voice, she answered two questions that the speaker posed. Shortly afterward, she got baptized.

² Maria’s parents were proud of their daughter’s decision to make an unreserved dedication to Jehovah and to get baptized. Even so, earlier her mother had some lingering questions. She had asked herself: ‘Is Maria too young to get baptized? Does she really understand the seriousness of what she is doing? Would it be better to have her wait before getting baptized?’ These are questions that many loving parents ask themselves when a child expresses the desire to get baptized. (Eccl. 5:5) After all, dedication and baptism are the most important steps in a Christian’s life.—See the box “Have You Dedicated Yourself to Jehovah?”

1, 2. (a) How do some Christian parents respond when their child asks to get baptized? (b) Why are baptism candidates asked if they have made a dedication to Jehovah? (See opening picture.)

SONGS: 52, 41

WHAT DO WE LEARN ABOUT BAPTISM FROM THE FOLLOWING SCRIPTURES?

1 Peter 3:20, 21

Matthew 28:19, 20

Acts 22:16



Have You Dedicated Yourself to Jehovah?

Before qualified Bible students are baptized as Jehovah's Witnesses, they are asked in front of onlookers to respond to two questions. The first question is, "*On the basis of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, have you repented of your sins and dedicated yourself to Jehovah to do his will?*"

Why is it reasonable to conclude that individuals who present themselves for baptism have already made an unreserved dedication to Jehovah? Just about a year before Jesus gave the commission to "make disciples . . . , baptizing them," he provided insight into what would be required of his followers. (Matt. 28:19, 20) In a discussion with his apostles and other disciples, he said: "If anyone wants to come after me, let him disown himself and pick up his torture stake and keep following me."—Matt. 16:24.

Jesus' whole life revolved around doing his Father's will. Thus, Bible students who wish to observe *all* the things that Jesus commanded must disown themselves, dedicating themselves unreservedly to Jehovah. In imitation of Jesus, they consider Jehovah's will to be paramount in their lives. (Matt. 26:39) When presenting themselves for baptism, such new disciples confirm that they have disowned themselves and are determined to serve God with all their strength, means, and abilities. (Rom. 12:1) For these reasons, baptism candidates are asked to confirm that they have dedicated themselves to Jehovah to do his will.

³ In discussing baptism, the apostle Peter referred to Noah's constructing of the ark: "Baptism, which corresponds to this, is also now saving you." (**Read 1 Peter 3:20, 21.**) The ark was a physical structure that provided undeniable visible evidence that Noah was devoted to the doing of God's will. Noah faithfully fulfilled the work assignment that Jehovah had given him. Yes, visible acts of faith led to the preservation of Noah and his family through the Flood. What is the point of Peter's illustration?

⁴ Just as the ark amounted to evidence of Noah's faith, baptism before onlookers provides visible evidence. What does it show? That a Christian disciple has dedicated himself to Jehovah on the basis of faith in the resurrected Christ. Like Noah, dedicated disciples obediently carry on in the work that God has assigned them to do. Just as Noah was preserved through the Flood, loyal baptized ones will be preserved when the present wicked world meets its end. (Mark 13:10; Rev. 7:9, 10) This makes dedication and baptism very important. A person who needlessly delays getting baptized endangers his prospects for everlasting life.

⁵ In view of how serious baptism is, three questions deserve our attention. What does the Bible say about baptism? What steps must a person take before getting baptized? Why should a Christian teacher have the importance of baptism clearly in mind when teaching his child or another Bible student?

3, 4. (a) How did the apostle Peter illustrate the importance of baptism? (b) Why can baptism be likened to constructing the ark in Noah's day?

5. What will we consider in this article?

BAPTISM IN THE BIBLE

⁶ We first read of baptism in the Bible in reference to that performed by John the Baptist. (Matt. 3:1-6) Those submitting to John's baptism did so as evidence of their repentance over sins against the Mosaic Law. It is noteworthy, however, that the most important baptism that John performed had nothing to do with repentance. John had the unique privilege of baptizing Jesus, the perfect human Son of God. (Matt. 3:13-17) Jesus was without sin, so he did not need to repent. (1 Pet. 2:22) His baptism symbolized the presenting of himself to do God's will.—Heb. 10:7.

⁷ During the course of Jesus' earthly ministry, his disciples also performed baptisms. (John 3:22; 4:1, 2) Like those performed by John, these baptisms symbolized the individuals' repentance over sins against the Mosaic Law. However, after Jesus' death and resurrection, baptism would take on a much different meaning for his followers.

⁸ In 33 C.E., the resurrected Jesus appeared to a crowd of more than 500 men, women, and possibly even children. It may have been on that occasion that he said: "Go, therefore, and make disciples of people of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the holy spirit, teaching them to observe all the things I have commanded you." (Matt. 28:19, 20; 1 Cor. 15:6) Yes, it seems that hundreds of his followers

6, 7. (a) Explain the significance of John's baptism. (b) What unique baptism did John perform?

8. (a) After his resurrection, Jesus gave what command to his followers? (b) Explain the significance of Christian baptism.

were present when Jesus gave the commission to make disciples. Jesus thus revealed that baptism would be a requirement for those who accept the yoke of Christian discipleship. (Matt. 11:29, 30) Anyone who wished to serve God acceptably would have to acknowledge and accept Jesus' role in the outworking of Jehovah's purpose. After doing so, that person could get baptized. This would be the only water baptism having God's approval. The Bible record provides abundant evidence that in the first century, new disciples of Christ understood the significance of baptism. And they did not unnecessarily delay getting baptized.—Acts 2:41; 9:18; 16:14, 15, 32, 33.

DO NOT DELAY

⁹ **Read Acts 8:35, 36.** Consider the example of the Ethiopian proselyte who was returning home after going to Jerusalem to worship. Prompted by Jehovah's angel, Philip approached the Ethiopian and "declared to him the good news about Jesus." What was the Ethiopian's response? What he did next gave clear evidence of his heartfelt appreciation for the truths he had learned. He desired to work in harmony with Jehovah's arrangement, so he got baptized without delay.

¹⁰ A second example is that of a Jewish man who was persecuting Christians. He was born in a nation that was dedicated to God. However, the Jews had lost their special relationship with Jehovah. That man was zealous for the traditions of Judaism, but he learned a better way. He

9, 10. What can we learn about baptism from the Ethiopian proselyte and from the apostle Paul?

received a personal witness from the resurrected and glorified Jesus Christ. What was the man's response? He welcomed assistance from the Christian disciple Ananias. Regarding that man the Bible tells us: "He then got up and was baptized." (Acts 9:17, 18; Gal. 1:14) You certainly recognize that Jewish man as the one who came to be known as the apostle Paul. But reflect on the fact that once he gained appreciation for the truth about Jesus' role in the outworking of God's purpose, Paul acted. He got baptized without delay.—**Read Acts 22: 12-16.**

¹¹ It is much the same with Bible students today, whether young or old. Those who have faith and genuine appreciation for Bible truth are eager to make a personal dedication and get baptized. The talk presented especially for such ones is a highlight of every assembly and convention. Jehovah's Witnesses rejoice when a Bible student accepts the truth and progresses to the point of water baptism. Do not Christian parents delight to see their children among the other new disciples getting baptized? During the 2017 service year, more than 284,000 "rightly disposed" individuals symbolized their dedication to Jehovah by water baptism. (Acts 13:48) Clearly, those new disciples understood that baptism is a requirement for Christians. What steps led up to their baptism?

¹² Before a student can get baptized, he must cultivate faith based on accurate knowledge of God, His purpose, and

11. (a) What motivates Bible students today to get baptized? (b) How are we affected when we see newly dedicated ones get baptized?

12. What steps must a Bible student take before baptism?

His arrangement for salvation. (1 Tim. 2:3-6) Such faith moves the student to reject conduct that is displeasing to God and to come in line with Jehovah's righteous standards. (Acts 3:19) Understandably, an individual could not make a valid dedication to God while engaging in any conduct that would exclude him from the Kingdom. (1 Cor. 6:9, 10) But more is needed than adhering to Jehovah's elevated moral standards. One who is pursuing righteousness would also be present at congregation meetings and have a meaningful share in the lifesaving preaching and disciple-making work. Jesus said that this work would be carried out by his true disciples. (Acts 1:8) Only after taking such steps can a new disciple make a valid dedication to Jehovah in private prayer and then publicly symbolize this dedication by getting baptized before onlookers.

A GOAL FOR BIBLE STUDENTS

¹³ As we assist our children and other Bible students to take the essential steps, we should bear in mind that genuine discipleship includes baptism. If we keep that clearly in mind, we will communicate more effectively with our students. We will not hold back from discussing at appropriate times the importance of dedication and baptism. Yes, we want our children and other Bible students to progress to the point of baptism!

¹⁴ Certainly, no one should feel pressured by a parent, a Bible teacher, or anyone else in the congregation to get

13. Why must Bible teachers bear in mind that baptism is a Christian requirement?

14. Why do we not pressure anyone to get baptized?

baptized. That is not Jehovah's way. (1 John 4:8) Rather, as we teach such ones, we ought to emphasize the importance of building a personal relationship with God. It is the student's heartfelt appreciation for the truth and his desire to shoulder the yoke of Christian discipleship that will move him to get baptized.—2 Cor. 5:14, 15.

¹⁵ There is no set age at which one should get baptized. Each student grows and matures at a different rate. Many get baptized at a young age, and they go on to be faithful to Jehovah. Other students see the importance of getting baptized after learning Bible truth when advanced in years—some being over 100 years of age!

¹⁶ One elderly Bible student asked her teacher if it was really necessary to get baptized again; she had previously been baptized in different religions over the years. The student and her teacher reviewed pertinent scriptures from the Bible. The student now understood the Bible's requirement and got baptized soon thereafter. Although in her late 70's, she did not feel that baptism was unnecessary for her. Yes, valid baptism is based on an *accurate* knowledge of Jehovah's will. Hence, new disciples must get baptized even if they previously were baptized in another religion.—**Read Acts 19:3-5.**

¹⁷ The day of one's baptism is a time for genuine rejoicing. It is also a time for sober reflection. Living up to one's ded-

15, 16. (a) Is there a certain age at which one should get baptized? Explain. (b) Why must a Bible student get baptized as one of Jehovah's Witnesses even if he was previously baptized in another religion?

17. What is it appropriate to contemplate on the day of one's baptism?

ication involves hard work. That is why Jesus compared Christian discipleship to a yoke. Jesus' disciples must "live no longer for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised up."—2 Cor. 5:15; Matt. 16:24.

¹⁸ Maria's mother had such thoughts in mind when she asked the questions mentioned in the introduction. If you are a parent, you may have asked yourself: 'Is my child really ready to get baptized? Does he or she have adequate knowledge to make a valid dedication? What about secular goals associated with education and a career? What if my child gets baptized and then falls into serious sin?' In the next article, we will consider these matters and discuss how Christian parents can maintain a balanced view of baptism.

18. What questions will we consider in the next article?

Do you bear in mind the importance of baptism, conveying that to your student?
(See paragraph 13)





Parents, Are You Helping Your Child Progress to Baptism?

“Why are you delaying? Rise, get baptized.”

—ACTS 22:16.

SONGS: 51, 135

HOW CAN THESE VERSES HELP PARENTS ASSIST THEIR CHILDREN TO PROGRESS TO BAPTISM?

Colossians 1:9, 10

Ecclesiastes 12:1

James 4:17

“FOR months I kept telling Dad and Mom that I wanted to be baptized, and they often talked to me about it. They wanted to make sure I knew how serious my decision was. On December 31, 1934, the day came for this momentous event in my life.” Blossom Brandt thus described events surrounding her decision to get baptized. Today, Christian parents have a similar interest in helping their children make wise decisions. Postponing baptism or delaying it needlessly could invite spiritual problems. (Jas. 4:17) Wisely, however, parents want to be sure that *before* their children get baptized, they are ready to shoulder the responsibility of Christian discipleship.

² Some circuit overseers have expressed concern because they meet young ones in their late teens and early 20’s who have grown up in Christian households but who have yet to

1. What do Christian parents want to be sure of before their children get baptized?
2. (a) Why have some circuit overseers expressed concern? (b) What will we consider in this article?

get baptized. In most cases, these young ones attend congregation meetings and share in the ministry. They view themselves as Jehovah's Witnesses. Yet, for some reason they hold back from dedicating their lives to Jehovah and getting baptized. What could be the reason for this? In some cases, parents have encouraged them to delay baptism. In this article, we will consider four concerns that have hindered some Christian parents from helping their children progress to baptism.

IS MY CHILD OLD ENOUGH?

³ Blossom's parents, mentioned in the first paragraph, were understandably concerned whether their daughter was old enough to grasp the significance and seriousness of baptism. How can parents know if a child is in a position to make a valid dedication?

⁴ **Read Matthew 28:19, 20.** As discussed in the preceding article, the Bible does not specify an age at which a person should get baptized. However, parents can benefit from reflecting on what it means to make a disciple. The Greek word translated "make disciples" at Matthew 28:19 has the sense of teaching with the *intent* of making pupils, or disciples. A disciple is one who learns and understands Jesus' teachings and who is determined to observe them. Thus, the goal of all Christian parents should be to teach their children from infancy with the intention of helping them become baptized disciples of Christ. Granted, an infant would not qualify for baptism.

3. Blossom's parents had what concern?

4. How can Jesus' command found at Matthew 28:19, 20 help parents as they teach their children?

However, the Bible shows that even relatively young children can grasp and appreciate Bible truths.

⁵ Timothy was a disciple who made the truth his own at a young age. The apostle Paul stated that Timothy had learned Scriptural truths from infancy. Even though Timothy grew up in a religiously divided household, his Jewish mother and grandmother cultivated in him an appreciation for the Scriptures, as the Jews understood them. As a result, his faith was unshakable. (2 Tim. 1:5; 3:14, 15) By the time he was in his late teens or early 20's, Timothy was a Christian disciple who could be considered for special privileges in the congregation.—Acts 16:1-3.

⁶ Of course, each child is unique; not all children become mature at the same rate or at the same point in life. Some have a good measure of mental and emotional maturity at a young age and express a desire to get baptized. Others may not be ready for baptism until they are a bit older. Thus, discerning parents do not pressure their children to get baptized. Rather, they assist each child to make spiritual advancement in keeping with his or her own growth and progress. Parents can rejoice when a child takes to heart the thought behind **Proverbs 27:11. (Read.)** However, they should never lose sight of their goal—to have their children become Christian disciples. With that in mind, parents will want to consider the question, 'Does my child have sufficient knowledge to

5, 6. (a) The Bible's description of Timothy leads us to what conclusion about his baptism? (b) How can discerning parents effectively assist their children?

make a dedication to God and get baptized?’

DOES MY CHILD HAVE ADEQUATE KNOWLEDGE?

⁷ It is fitting that as teachers in the family, parents want their children to gain a solid foundation of knowledge on which a dedication may be based. Even so, an exhaustive knowledge is not required before a person can make a dedication to God and get baptized. After baptism, all disciples should keep on growing in accurate knowledge. **(Read Colossians 1:9, 10.)** So how much knowledge is initially required?

⁸ The experience of a family in the first century offers parents some insight. (Acts 16:25-33) While on his second missionary tour, about 50 C.E., Paul visited Philippi. While there, he and his companion Silas were arrested on false charges and thrown in jail. During the night, an earthquake shook the foundations of the jail and opened all the doors. The jailer, fearing that the prisoners had escaped, was on the verge of committing suicide when Paul called out to him. Paul and Silas were able to give a fine witness to the jailer and his family. Their appreciation for the truths they were learning about Jesus prompted them to take what step? They got baptized without delay. What can we learn from this account?

⁹ According to custom, the jailer may have been a retired army veteran. He was not familiar with the Scriptures. So

7. Does someone who wants to get baptized need to have an exhaustive knowledge of the Bible? Explain.

8, 9. What lessons can we learn from the account about Paul and the jailer?

to gain a solid foundation of Scriptural knowledge, he needed to learn basic Bible truths, understand what it means to be one of God’s servants, and be determined to obey Jesus’ teachings. In a relatively brief time, his knowledge of basic Scriptural truths and his appreciation of them prompted him to get baptized. No doubt he continued to add to his knowledge after his baptism. With this example in mind, what can you do when your child expresses a heartfelt appreciation for basic Scriptural teachings, including the meaning and significance of dedication and baptism? You Christian parents may conclude that he can contact the congregation elders to see if he meets the qualifications to get baptized.* Like other baptized disciples, he will continue to increase in knowledge of Jehovah’s purpose throughout his life, even for all eternity.—Rom. 11:33, 34.

IS MY CHILD BEING EDUCATED FOR SUCCESS?

¹⁰ Some parents have concluded that it would be best for their son or daughter to delay baptism in order first to obtain some advanced education and become secure in a career. Such reasoning may be well-intentioned, but will it help their child to achieve genuine success? More important, is it in harmony with the Scriptures? What course does Jehovah’s Word encourage?—**Read Ecclesiastes 12:1.**

* Parents can review with their child the helpful information in *Questions Young People Ask—Answers That Work*, Volume 2, pp. 304-310. See also the “Question Box” in *Our Kingdom Ministry*, April 2011, p. 2.

10, 11. (a) What have some parents concluded? (b) What should be a parent’s first concern?

¹¹ It is important to remember that this world and all its components are opposed to Jehovah's interests and thinking. (Jas. 4:7, 8; 1 John 2:15-17; 5:19) A close relationship with Jehovah is a child's best defense against Satan, his world, and its ungodly thinking. For a parent to place high priority on secular pursuits could confuse a child and jeopardize his best interests. Would loving Christian parents really want this world to shape their child's view of success? The fact is, we find true joy and success only when we give Jehovah first place in our lives.—**Read Psalm 1:2, 3.**

WHAT IF MY CHILD WERE TO SIN?

¹² In explaining her reasons for discouraging her daughter from getting baptized, one Christian mother stated, "I am ashamed to say that the major reason was the disfellowshipping arrangement." Like that sister, some parents have reasoned that it is better for their child to postpone baptism until he has outgrown the childish tendency to behave foolishly. (Gen. 8:21; Prov. 22:15) They may conclude, 'As long as my child is not baptized, he cannot be disfellowshipped.' Why is this deceptive reasoning?—Jas. 1:22.

¹³ Understandably, Christian parents would not want their child to get baptized before being mature enough to make a valid dedication. However, it would be a mistake to conclude that by not being baptized, a child is not accountable to Jehovah. Why is that? Accountability to Jehovah is not founded on the act of getting baptized. Rather, a

12. Why have some parents wanted their child to postpone baptism?

13. Does delaying baptism make one less accountable to Jehovah? Explain.

child is accountable to God when the child knows what is right and what is wrong in Jehovah's eyes. (**Read James 4:17.**) Thus, rather than discourage a child from getting baptized, wise parents work hard to set the right example. They want to cultivate in their child from infancy a heartfelt appreciation for Jehovah's elevated moral standards. (Luke 6:40) Such appreciation is the best protection, for your child will be motivated to hold to Jehovah's righteous way.—Isa. 35:8.

OTHERS CAN HELP

¹⁴ As spiritual shepherds, congregation elders can reinforce parents' efforts by speaking positively about spiritual goals. One sister who served as a pioneer for more than 70 years recalled the impact of her conversation with Brother Charles T. Russell when she was only six years old. She related, "He took 15 minutes with me to discuss my spiritual goals." Yes, positive words and encouragement can have a long-lasting effect. (Prov. 25:11) Elders can also include parents and their children in Kingdom Hall projects, giving tasks to youths in keeping with their age and abilities.

¹⁵ Members of the congregation can help by demonstrating appropriate personal interest in young ones. This would include being alert to indications of spiritual progress. Did a youth give a heartfelt, well-thought-out comment or share in a part on the mid-week meeting program? Has a youth

14. How can the elders reinforce the efforts of parents who are helping their children progress to baptism?

15. What are some ways that others in the congregation can encourage young ones?



Parents should have the goal of helping their child become a disciple
(See paragraphs 16, 17)

successfully faced a test of integrity or taken advantage of an opportunity to give a witness at school? Be quick to offer sincere commendation. What about making it a point—before or after a meeting—to talk with a young person, manifesting your genuine interest? In these ways and others, young ones can be made to realize that they are part of “the great congregation.”—Ps. 35:18.

HELP YOUR CHILD PROGRESS TO BAPTISM

¹⁶ Bringing up a child in “the discipline and admonition of Jehovah” is one of the greatest privileges a Christian parent can have. (Eph. 6:4; Ps. 127:3) Unlike children in the ancient nation of Israel, the children of Christian parents are not born as part of a people dedicated to Jehovah. Moreover, love for God and for truth is not inherited. From the day of their child’s birth, parents should have the intent to make a disciple, as—

16, 17. (a) How does baptism relate to one’s future life prospects? (b) What joy do all Christian parents strive for? (See opening picture.)

sisting their child to become a dedicated, baptized servant of Jehovah. What could be more important? After all, it is each individual’s dedication, baptism, and faithful service to God that will bring him in line for being marked for salvation during the coming great tribulation.—Matt. 24:13.

¹⁷ When Blossom Brandt decided that she wanted to get baptized, her God-fearing parents wanted to be sure that she was ready to take the most important step of her life. Once they were certain that she was ready, they supported her decision. On the night before her baptism, her father did a beautiful thing. Blossom related: “He had all of us get on our knees, and he offered a prayer. He told Jehovah that he was so happy about his little girl’s decision to dedicate her life to Him.” More than 60 years later, Blossom stated: “You can be sure, in all the ages to come, I’ll never forget that night!” May you parents experience the joy and satisfaction that result from seeing your children become dedicated, baptized servants of Jehovah.

Why do Jehovah's Witnesses depict the apostle Paul as being bald or having little hair?

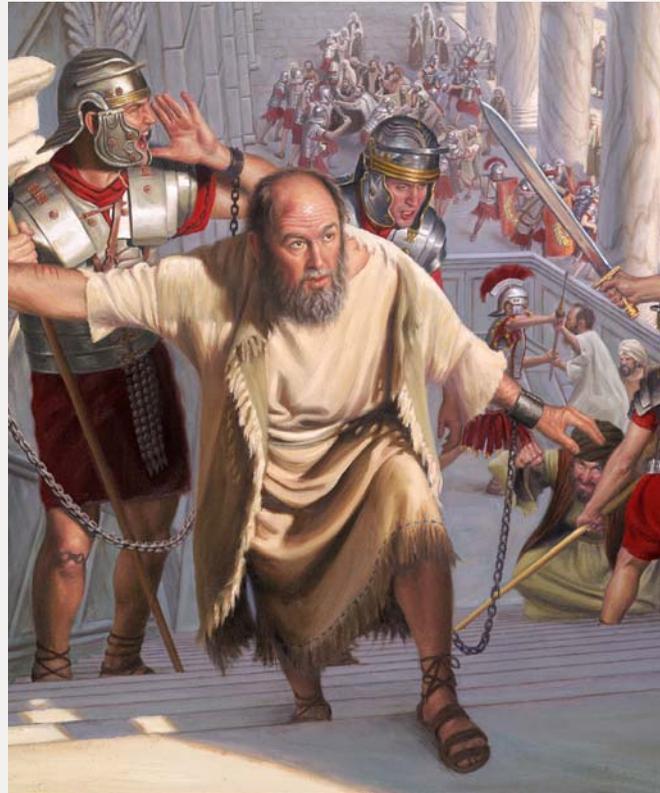
■ Frankly, no man today can be certain of Paul's appearance. The drawings and paintings in our publications are artistic representations, not images based on proven archaeological facts.

However, there are some indications of Paul's appearance. For example, *Zion's Watch Tower* of March 1, 1902, mentioned one, saying: "As to Paul's personal appearance: . . . In the 'Acts of Paul and Thecla,' . . . written about A. D. 150, there is a description of Paul which is probably the best, and a true tradition. In this he is described as 'small in size, bald-headed, bandy-legged, well built, with eyebrows meeting; rather long nosed.'"

The Oxford Dictionary of the Christian Church (1997 edition) says about that ancient writing: "It is not impossible that the 'Acts' contain some elements of historical truth." *The Acts of Paul and Thecla* was highly regarded in early centuries, as confirmed by the fact that 80 Greek manuscripts of it exist, as well as versions in other languages. Thus, our artistic presentations are in line with some ancient indications of what the apostle looked like.

Bear in mind, though, that other things are more significant than Paul's appearance. Even while Paul was carrying on his ministry, some fleshly critics charged that "his presence in person [was] weak and his speech contemptible." (2 Cor. 10:10) But we should not forget that he became a Christian by a miraculous display from Jesus. We can also think about what Paul accomplished as "a chosen vessel to [Christ] to bear [Jesus'] name to the nations." (Acts 9:3-5, 15; 22:6-8) And consider how much benefit we can draw from the Bible books that Jehovah inspired Paul to write.

Paul did not boast over his accomplishments before becoming a Christian; nor did he describe his physical appearance. (Acts 26:4, 5; Phil. 3:4-6) He admitted: "I am the least of the apostles, and I am not worthy of being called an apostle." (1 Cor. 15:9) He later wrote: "To me, a man less than the least of all holy ones, this undeserved kindness was given, so that I should declare to the nations the good news about the unfathomable riches of the Christ." (Eph. 3:8) That message is certainly more significant than any concern about what Paul may have looked like.





The Delightful Course of Hospitality—So Needed!

“Be hospitable to one another without grumbling.”

—1 PET. 4:9.

SONGS: 100, 87

HOW DO YOU FEEL ABOUT . . .

the need for hospitality
within the congregation?

opportunities we have
to extend hospitality?

overcoming barriers to
extending hospitality?

SOMETIME between the years 62 and 64 C.E., the apostle Peter wrote to “the temporary residents scattered about in Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia.” (1 Pet. 1:1) These culturally diverse congregations in Asia Minor needed encouragement and guidance. They were suffering opposition and were subjected to abusive speech. They faced “fiery trials.” And they lived at a critical time. “The end of all things has drawn close,” wrote Peter. Yes, the violent end of the Jewish system of things would come in less than a decade. What could help Christians everywhere to get through those stressful times?—1 Pet. 4:4, 7, 12.

² Among other things, Peter urged his brothers: “Be hospitable to one another.” (1 Pet. 4:9) The word “hospitality” in Greek literally means “fondness for, or kindness to, strangers.” Note, however, that Peter urged his Christian brothers and sisters to be hospitable “to one another,” to those whom

-
1. What conditions did first-century Christians face?
 - 2, 3. Why did Peter urge his brothers to show hospitality? (See opening picture.)

they already knew and associated with. How would being hospitable help them?

³ It would draw them together. Consider your own experience. Have you had the pleasure of being invited to someone's home? Did that occasion not leave you with warm memories? When you entertained some from your congregation, was your friendship not deepened? By extending hospitality, we get to know our brothers and sisters in a more personal way than we can in other settings. Christians in Peter's day needed to draw ever closer as conditions grew worse. The same is true for Christians in these "last days."—2 Tim. 3:1.

⁴ What opportunities do we have for extending hospitality "to one another"? How can we overcome barriers that may hinder us from being hospitable? What can help us be good guests?

OPPORTUNITIES TO SHOW HOSPITALITY

⁵ **At meetings:** We welcome all who attend our Christian meetings as fellow guests at a spiritual meal. Jehovah and his organization are our hosts. (Rom. 15:7) When new ones attend, we become cohosts, as it were. Why not take the initiative to welcome these new ones, no matter how they may be dressed or groomed? (Jas. 2:1-4) If a visitor is not already being cared for, could you invite him to sit with you? He might appreciate help to follow the program and perhaps to find scriptures being read. This would be a fine way to "follow the course of hospitality."—Rom. 12:13.

4. What questions will we consider in this article?

5. How can we be hospitable at our Christian meetings?

⁶ **For refreshments or a meal:** In Bible times, hospitality normally included inviting someone to one's home for a meal. (Gen. 18:1-8; Judg. 13:15; Luke 24:28-30) An invitation to share food was an invitation to friendship and peace. Who should be among our primary guests? Those who are a regular part of our lives, the brothers and sisters in our congregation. When hard times come, will we not depend on one another? We need loyal friendships and peace with all of them. Interestingly, in 2011 the Governing Body changed the time of the *Watchtower* Study for the United States Bethel family from 6:45 p.m. to 6:15 p.m. Why? The announcement stated that more will likely be inclined to show and accept hospitality with fellow Bethelites when the meeting ends earlier. Other branch offices followed suit. This arrangement has drawn Bethel families closer than ever.

⁷ Visits of public speakers from other congregations, as well as visits of circuit overseers and, at times, representatives from the local branch office, provide opportunities for us to extend hospitality. **(Read 3 John 5-8.)** Providing refreshments or a meal is one fine way of doing this. Could you assist?

⁸ A sister in the United States remembers: "Over the years, my husband and I have had the opportunity to provide hospitality in our home for many speakers and their wives. *Every* experience has been a delight—fun and, most of all, spiritually edifying. We have never regretted it."

6. Who should be among the primary guests in our homes?

7, 8. How can we provide hospitality to visiting representatives of Jehovah's organization?

9 Long-term guests: In ancient times, hospitality often included providing lodging for trustworthy visitors. (Job 31:32; Philem. 22) In our day, too, such a need arises. Circuit overseers often need lodging when they visit the congregations. Students at theocratic schools may need places to stay, as may construction volunteers. Natural disasters may leave some families homeless and in need of lodging until relief efforts can restore their dwellings. We should not assume that only those who have very comfortable homes are in a position to help; they may already have done so many times. Could you share in offering accommodations even if your circumstances are modest?

10 A brother in South Korea fondly remembers that he provided accommodations for students attending theocratic schools. He writes: "I hesitated initially because we were newly married and living in a small house. But having students stay with us was truly a joyous experience. As newlyweds, we were able to see how happy a couple can be when they serve Jehovah and pursue spiritual goals together."

11 New to the congregation: Individuals and families may move to your area. Some may come to serve where the need is greater. Pioneers may be sent to assist in your congregation. All of them are initially out of their element to some extent—in a new community, new congregation, perhaps even a new language or culture. Inviting them for refreshments,

9, 10. (a) Who may need long-term hospitality? (b) Can even those who have modest dwellings assist? Illustrate.

11. Why may those who are new to your congregation need hospitality?

a meal, or an outing will help them to make new friends and adjust to their changed circumstances.

12 Hospitality need not be elaborate. (**Read Luke 10:41, 42.**) In recounting the early days of his service as a missionary, a brother says: "We were young, inexperienced, and homesick. One evening my wife was particularly homesick, and my efforts to help were not working. Then, about 7:30 p.m., we heard a knock on the door. There stood a Bible student who brought us three oranges. She had come to welcome the new missionaries. We invited her in and gave her a glass of water. Then we made tea and hot chocolate. We didn't know Swahili yet, and she didn't know English. But that incident began our greatest delight in forging friendships with the local brothers."

OVERCOMING BARRIERS TO HOSPITALITY

13 Have you held back from offering hospitality? If so, you may have missed out on opportunities for delightful company and for forming lasting friendships. Hospitality is one of the finest antidotes to loneliness. But you may wonder, "Why would anyone hold back?" There could be a number of reasons.

14 Time and energy: Jehovah's servants are very busy and often have multiple commitments. Some may feel that they simply do not have the time or energy to show hospitality. If that is your situation, it may be that you need to ex-

12. What experience shows that hospitality need not be elaborate?

13. What benefits come from being hospitable?

14. What might we do if having little time and energy limits our accepting or extending hospitality?

amine your current schedule of activities. Could you make some adjustments so that you will have time and energy to accept or offer hospitality? The Scriptures urge Christians to extend hospitality. (Heb. 13:2) It is not wrong to make time for this; actually, it is the right thing to do. You may, of course, need to be willing to limit some optional activities.

15 Your feelings about yourself: Have you ever wanted to be hospitable but felt inadequate? Some are shy and fear that conversation would lag or that guests might not feel entertained. Others have limited income and believe that they could never offer what other members of the congregation could. Remember, of prime importance about a home is, not that it is fancy, but that it is orderly, clean, and inviting.

16 If you feel anxious about having guests, you are not alone. An elder in Britain admits: “There can be a measure of nervousness in preparing for guests. But as with anything in relation to serving Jehovah, the benefits and satisfaction that result far outweigh any anxiety. I have enjoyed simply sitting down with guests over coffee and talking.” Remember that showing personal interest in guests is always helpful. (Phil. 2:4) Nearly everyone enjoys sharing his experiences in life. Social occasions may be the only times others ask to hear about our experiences. Another elder writes: “Having friends from the congregation to my home helps me to understand them better and gives me time to get to know them, especially how they came into the

15. What anxieties about extending hospitality might some have?

16, 17. What may alleviate worries about having guests?

truth.” Loving interest can make any occasion a delight.

17 A pioneer sister who hosted students attending various theocratic schools admitted: “Initially I was concerned because my accommodations are very modest, and I have secondhand furniture. The wife of one of the instructors really put me at ease. She said that when she and her husband are serving in the traveling work, their best weeks are those spent staying with a spiritual person who may not have much materially but who has the same focus as they have—serving Jehovah and keeping life simple. This reminded me of what my mum used to say to us as children: ‘Better a dish of vegetables where there’s love.’” (Prov. 15:17) Let love motivate your hospitality, and you need not worry.

18 Your feelings about others: Is there someone in your congregation who rubs you the wrong way? Your initial feelings about that person may be negative and can become long-lasting if nothing is done to improve them. Personality differences may neutralize your good intentions to extend hospitality. Or someone may have hurt you in the past, and you find it hard to forget.

19 To improve relationships, even with enemies, the Bible recommends hospitality. **(Read Proverbs 25:21, 22.)** Extending hospitality to someone can reduce friction and soften hard feelings. It can bring to the surface lovable aspects of our guest’s personality, aspects that Jehovah saw when he drew that one to the truth. (John 6:44) If extended with love, an unexpected invitation can be the start of a completely changed

18, 19. How can being hospitable help us overcome negative feelings about others?



Hosts usually prepare well for their guests
(See paragraph 20)

relationship. How can you make sure that love is your honest motive? One way is by following the encouragement given at Philippians 2:3: “With humility consider others superior to you.” Finding ways that our brothers or sisters *are* superior to us—be it their faith, endurance, fearlessness, or some other Christian quality—will deepen our love for them and open the way for genuine and healing hospitality.

BEING A GOOD GUEST

²⁰ The psalmist David asked: “O Jehovah, who may be a guest in your tent?” (Ps. 15:1) He followed that question with a discussion of spiritual qualities that God looks for in his guests. One quality is being true to our word: “He does not go back on his promise, even when it is bad for him.” (Ps. 15:4) If we accept an invitation, we should not cancel frivolously. Our host may well have made

20. Why and how should we honor an invitation we have accepted?

preparations, and all his effort may be for nothing if we cancel. (Matt. 5:37) Some have at times canceled a previous invitation in order to accept a seemingly better one. Would that be loving and respectful? Rather, we should accept hospitality with genuine appreciation for whatever our hosts have to offer. (Luke 10:7) And if truly unavoidable circumstances force us to cancel, it would be loving and considerate to let our hosts know as soon as possible.

²¹ It is also important to respect local customs. In some cultures, unexpected guests are welcome; in others, prior arrangements are preferred. In some places, hosts honor guests with the finest they have to offer, letting family take second place; in others, everyone shares alike. In some areas, guests normally bring something to contribute to the occasion; in others, hosts are happier when their guests feel no such obligation. And in some cultures, it is expected that guests politely decline the first invitation or two; in others, to decline comes across as unappreciative. Let us do our utmost to make our hosts happy that they invited us.

²² In a broader sense than ever, “the end of all things has drawn close.” (1 Pet. 4:7) We face the greatest tribulation the world has ever seen. As pressures mount, we will need the deepest of love between us and our brothers and sisters. As never before, Peter’s counsel to Christians applies: “Be hospitable to one another,” a delightful and needed course that will have no end.—1 Pet. 4:9.

21. How can respecting local customs contribute to our being good guests?

22. Why is it so important to “be hospitable to one another”?



Jehovah Has Never Failed Me!

AS TOLD BY
ERIKA NÖHRER BRIGHT

I was among four little girls chosen to present Adolf Hitler with flowers after he gave a speech one time. Why was I picked? My father was very involved in Nazi activities and was the chauffeur for the leader of a local branch of that party. My mother was a devout Catholic and wanted me to be a nun. Despite these two strong influences, I became neither a Nazi nor a nun. Let me tell you why.

I WAS raised in Graz, Austria. At age seven, I was sent to a school for religious training. However, I witnessed shocking sexual immorality between priests and nuns. So my mother allowed me to leave the school within a year.

Later, I went to boarding school. One night, Father came there to take me to safety because Graz was being heavily bombed. We took refuge in the town of Schladming. Just after we arrived and crossed a bridge, it was blown up. Another time, low-flying airplanes shot at my grandmother and me in our yard. By war's end, it seemed that both the church and the government had failed us.

LEARNING OF UNFAILING SUPPORT

In 1950, one of Jehovah's Witnesses began sharing the Bible's message with my mother. I would listen to their conversations and even accompany Mother to some congregation meetings. Becoming convinced that Jehovah's Witnesses had the truth, she got baptized in 1952.

At the time, the local congregation seemed to me like an old-ladies' club. Later, however, we visited a congregation where there were many young people—not an old-ladies' club at all! When back in Graz, I started attending all the meetings, and soon I too was convinced that what I was learning was the truth. I also came to know Jehovah as a God who gives his servants unfailing support. He does so even when we feel that we are facing impossible circumstances alone.—Ps. 3:5, 6.

I wanted to share the truth with others. I started with my siblings. My four older sisters had already left home to work as schoolteachers. But I visited them in

different villages and encouraged them to study the Bible. Eventually, all my siblings did so and became Jehovah's Witnesses.

During my second week in the door-to-door ministry, I met a woman in her 30's with whom I began to study the Bible. She progressed to baptism, and later, so did her husband and two sons. That study had a profound spiritual effect on me. Why? Well, no one had ever had a formal Bible study with me. I had to prepare well for each lesson. In a sense, I did so first to teach myself and then so that I could teach my student! That really deepened my appreciation for the truth. In April 1954, I symbolized my dedication to Jehovah by water baptism.

“PERSECUTED, BUT NOT ABANDONED”

In 1955, I attended international conventions in Germany, France, and England. While in London, I met Albert Schroeder. He was an instructor at the Bible School of Gilead, and later he served as a member of the Governing Body. During a tour of the British Museum, Brother Schroeder pointed out to us some Bible manuscripts. They contained God's name

in Hebrew letters, and he explained their importance. This touched me emotionally and spiritually, making me more determined than ever to promote the truth from God's Word.

I began serving as a full-time pioneer on January 1, 1956. Four months later, I was invited to serve as a special pioneer in Austria. At the time, there were no Witnesses in Mistelbach, the town where I was to serve. But I faced a particular challenge. My pioneer partner and I were quite different. I was almost 19 and from the city; she was 25 and a country girl. I liked to sleep late each morning; she liked to get up early. Come evening, I was inclined to stay up; she wanted to go to bed early. Still, applying the Bible's advice, we worked out our differences and enjoyed success as pioneer partners.

Actually, we faced other significant challenges. There was even some persecution, but we were “not abandoned.” (2 Cor. 4: 7-9) Once, while we were preaching in a rural village, the people turned their dogs loose. My partner and I were soon surrounded by large dogs barking and baring their teeth. We held hands, and I even prayed, “Jehovah, please, when they get us, may we die quickly!” When the dogs came within an arm's length of us, they stopped, wagged their tails, and walked away. We felt that Jehovah had protected us. After that, we preached throughout that village, and to our delight, the people were very receptive. Perhaps they were surprised that the dogs had not harmed us or that we had persevered after such a frightening experience. Some of them eventually became Witnesses.

We had another frightening experience. One day our landlord came home drunk, threatening to kill us and claiming that we were disturbing the neighborhood. His wife

Our family with Father in his military uniform



With my partner (right), serving as special pioneers in Mistelbach, Austria



With my husband, Walter, when we were serving as missionaries in Asunción, Paraguay

tried to calm him but without success. We heard all of that from our room upstairs. We quickly put chairs in front of our door and started packing our suitcases. When we opened the door, our landlord was standing at the top of the stairs, holding a huge knife. So we fled through the back door and down the long garden path with all our belongings, never to return.

We went to a hotel and asked for a room. As it turned out, we stayed there for almost a year, which ultimately benefited our ministry. How so? The hotel was in the center of town, and some of our Bible students wanted to study there. Soon we were holding the book study and the weekly *Watchtower* Study in our hotel room, with about 15 attending.

We stayed in Mistelbach for more than a year. Then I was reassigned to Feldbach, southeast of Graz. I had a new pioneer partner, but again there was no congregation. We lived in a tiny room on the second floor of a log cabin. The wind whistled through the gaps between the logs, so we

tried to block the holes with newspapers. We also had to collect water from a well. But it was worth it. Within a few months, a group was established. Eventually, some 30 members of a family with whom we studied came into the truth!

Such experiences strengthened my appreciation for Jehovah's unfailing support of those who pursue Kingdom interests. Even if we are beyond the reach of human help, Jehovah is always there.—Ps. 121:1-3.

SUPPORTED BY GOD'S "RIGHT HAND OF RIGHTEOUSNESS"

In 1958 an international convention was to be held in New York City, at Yankee Stadium and Polo Grounds. I applied to attend, and the Austria branch asked whether I would be interested in attending the 32nd class of Gilead School. How could I refuse such a privilege? I immediately responded, "Yes!"

In class at Gilead, I sat next to Martin Poetzinger. He had endured dreadful experiences in Nazi concentration camps. He

too later served as a member of the Governing Body. During class, Martin would sometimes whisper, “Erika, what does that mean in German?”

Halfway through the course, Nathan Knorr announced our assignments. Mine was to Paraguay. Because I was so young, I needed my father’s permission to enter that country. After obtaining that, I arrived in Paraguay in March 1959. I was assigned to a missionary home in Asunción, with a new partner.

Before long, I met Walter Bright, a missionary who had graduated from the 30th class. In time, we married and could face life’s challenges together. Whenever we encountered a trying problem, we read Jehovah’s promise at Isaiah 41:10: “Do not be afraid, for I am with you. Do not be anxious, for I am your God. I will fortify you.” This reassured us that as long as we strove to remain faithful to God and put his Kingdom first, he would never fail us.

In time, we were assigned to an area close to the Brazil border. There the clergy incited young people to throw rocks at our missionary home, which was already not in the best condition. Then Walter started a Bible study with the chief of police. He made sure that police officers stood near our home for a week, and the persecutors gave us no more trouble. Shortly thereafter, we were moved to more suitable quarters across the Brazilian border. This proved to be advantageous because we could hold meetings both in Paraguay and in Brazil. Before we left that assignment, there were two small congregations.

JEHOVAH CONTINUES TO SUSTAIN ME

My doctors had told me that I could not have children, so we were surprised to learn in 1962 that I was expecting! We eventually

settled in Hollywood, Florida, near Walter’s family. For a number of years, Walter and I were not in a position to pioneer. We had to care for a family. Still, we continued to give priority to Kingdom interests.—Matt. 6:33.

When we arrived in Florida in November 1962, we were surprised to find that local sentiments about integration meant that black brothers held their meetings separately from white brothers and that they preached in separate areas. But Jehovah does not make racial distinctions, and before too long the congregations became racially integrated. Jehovah’s hand in this arrangement was apparent, as there are now dozens of congregations in the area.

Sadly, Walter died of brain cancer in 2015. He was a wonderful husband for 55 years, one who loved Jehovah and helped many brothers. I look forward to seeing him again in renewed health when he is resurrected.—Acts 24:15.

I am grateful to have been in the full-time service for over 40 years, experiencing many joys and rewards. For example, Walter and I were able to be present for the baptisms of 136 of our Bible students. Of course, there were some hardships. But we never viewed these as a reason to stop serving our faithful God. Instead, we drew closer to him, trusting him to resolve matters in his own time and in his own way. And he does!—2 Tim. 4:16, 17.

I do miss Walter very much, but pioneering helps me to cope. I find it especially beneficial to teach others, even sharing the resurrection hope with them. Indeed, in more ways than I can recount, Jehovah has never failed me. True to his promise, he has sustained me, fortified me, and taken hold of me with his “right hand of righteousness.”—Isa. 41:10.



Discipline

Evidence of God's Love

“Those whom Jehovah loves he disciplines.”—HEB. 12:6.

WHEN you hear the word “discipline,” what comes to mind? Perhaps you immediately think of punishment, but much more is involved. In the Bible, discipline is often presented in an appealing light, at times alongside knowledge, wisdom, love, and life. (Prov. 1:2-7; 4:11-13) That is because God’s discipline is an expression of his love for us and of his desire that we gain everlasting life. (Heb. 12:6) While his discipline may include chastisement, it is never abusive or cruel. Indeed, the meaning behind “discipline” primarily relates to education, such as that involved in raising a beloved child.

² Consider this example: A little boy named Johnny is throwing a ball in the house. His mother says: “Johnny, you know that you should not play with your ball in the house! You might break something.” But disregarding his mother’s direction, he continues to play with the ball and accidentally breaks a vase. How will his mother discipline him? Her discipline may involve both teaching and some punishment. In

1. How is discipline often presented in the Bible?
- 2, 3. How may discipline include both teaching and punishment? (See opening picture.)

SONGS: 123, 86

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

What has Shebna’s experience taught you about God’s discipline?

When giving discipline, how can we imitate Jehovah and his Son?

We can view discipline as preparing us for what?

teaching him, she may remind Johnny why his conduct was wrong. She wants to convey to him the wisdom of obeying his parents, explaining that their rules are necessary and reasonable. Then reinforcing her words, she may administer some form of appropriate punishment. For example, she might take the ball away from Johnny for a period of time. That may impress on him that disobedience has consequences.

³ As members of the Christian congregation, we are part of God's household. (1 Tim. 3:15) We therefore respect Jehovah's right both to set standards and to give loving discipline when we violate them. Moreover, if our actions caused unpleasant consequences, his discipline would remind us of just how important it is to listen to our heavenly Father. (Gal. 6:7) God cares deeply for us and wants to spare us heartache.—1 Pet. 5: 6, 7.

⁴ By giving Scriptural discipline, we can help our child or a Bible student to reach the goal of becoming a follower of Christ. God's Word, our primary tool for training, enables us to 'discipline in righteousness.' Thus our child or Bible student can be helped to understand and 'observe all the things Jesus commanded us.' (2 Tim. 3:16; Matt. 28:19, 20) Jehovah blesses this kind of training, which equips students to make yet more disciples of Christ. **(Read Titus 2: 11-14.)** Let us now consider the answers to three important questions: (1) How does God's discipline reflect his love for us? (2) What can we learn from those whom God disciplined in the past?

4. (a) Jehovah blesses what kind of training?
(b) What will we consider in this article?

(3) When we give discipline, how can we imitate Jehovah and his Son?

GOD DISCIPLINES IN LOVE

⁵ Motivated by love, Jehovah corrects, educates, and trains us so that we can remain in his love and on the path to life. (1 John 4:16) He never demeans or insults us, causing us to question our personal value. (Prov. 12:18) Rather, Jehovah dignifies us, appealing to the goodness in our heart and respecting our free will. Is that how you view God's discipline, whether it comes through his Word, Bible-based publications, Christian parents, or congregation elders? Indeed, elders who try to readjust us in a mild and loving manner when we take "a false step," perhaps unknowingly, reflect *Jehovah's* love for us.—Gal. 6:1.

⁶ At times, though, discipline may involve more than counsel or oral correction. If more serious sins are involved, it may include a loss of privileges in the congregation. Even when that is the case, such discipline reflects God's love for us. A loss of privileges, for example, can help a person realize how important it is for him to focus more on personal Bible study, meditation, and prayer. He can thus be strengthened spiritually. (Ps. 19:7) In time, privileges may be restored. Even disfellowshipping reflects Jehovah's love, for it protects the congregation from bad influences. (1 Cor. 5: 6, 7, 11) And because God disciplines to the proper degree, disfellowshipping can impress on the wrongdoer the seriousness of his sin and move him to repentance.—Acts 3:19.

5. In what ways does discipline from Jehovah reflect his love for us?

6. When discipline involves restrictions, how does this reflect God's love?



Humbly adjusting our attitude leads to God's blessing
(See paragraphs 8-10)

HE BENEFITED FROM JEHOVAH'S DISCIPLINE

⁷ To underscore the value of discipline, let us consider two individuals whom Jehovah disciplined: Shebna, who lived in the time of King Hezekiah, and Graham, a brother in our day. As the steward “in charge of the house”—presumably that of Hezekiah—Shebna had considerable authority. (Isa. 22:15) Sadly, though, he became proud, seeking his own glory. He even had an opulent tomb made for himself, and he rode in “glorious chariots!”—Isa. 22:16-18.

⁸ Because Shebna pursued glory for himself, God ‘threw him out of his office’ and replaced him with Eliakim. (Isa. 22:19-21) This change occurred when Assyrian King Sennacherib was intending to attack Jerusalem. Sometime later, that king sent high officials to Jerusalem, along with a large army, to demoralize the Jews and intimidate Hezekiah into surrendering. (2 Ki. 18:17-25) Eliakim was sent to speak to the officials, but he was not alone. He was accompanied by two others, one of whom was Shebna,

7. Who was Shebna, and what bad trait did he begin to develop?

8. How did Jehovah discipline Shebna, and with what result?

now serving as secretary. Might this not suggest that Shebna did not give way to bitterness and resentment but instead humbly accepted his lesser responsibilities? If so, what lessons can we learn from the account? Let us consider three.

⁹ First, Shebna lost his position. His experience bears out the warning that “pride is before a crash, and a haughty spirit before stumbling.” (Prov. 16:18) If you have privileges in the congregation, perhaps with a measure of prominence, will you strive to maintain a humble view of yourself? Will you give credit to Jehovah for any gifts you have or for what you have accomplished? (1 Cor. 4:7) The apostle Paul wrote: “I tell everyone there among you not to think more of himself than it is necessary to think, but to think so as to have a sound mind.”—Rom. 12:3.

¹⁰ Second, in strongly reproving Shebna, Jehovah may have been showing that he did not consider Shebna beyond recovery. (Prov. 3:11, 12) What a fine lesson for those who lose privileges of service in God's congregation today!

9-11. (a) What important lessons can we learn from Shebna's experience? (b) How are you encouraged by Jehovah's treatment of Shebna?

Instead of being angry and resentful, may they continue to serve God to the best of their ability in their new situation, viewing the discipline as evidence of Jehovah's love. Remember, our Father will not consider us beyond hope if we humble ourselves before him. **(Read 1 Peter 5:6, 7.)** Loving discipline can be God's way of molding us, so let us remain malleable in his hands.

¹¹ Third, Jehovah's treatment of Shebna provides a valuable lesson for those who are authorized to administer discipline, such as parents and Christian overseers. The lesson? While Jehovah's discipline can reflect his hatred of sin, it can also show his concern for the person who sinned. If as a parent or an overseer you must administer discipline, will you imitate Jehovah, hating the wrong while looking for the good in your child or fellow believer?—Jude 22, 23.

¹² Sadly, after receiving discipline, some fail to see past the pain and even draw away from God and his people. (Heb. 3:12, 13) But does that mean that such ones are beyond help? Consider Graham, who was disfellowshipped, in time was reinstated, and then became spiritually inactive. Some years later, he asked an elder who had befriended him to study the Bible with him.

¹³ The elder recalled: "Graham had a problem with pride. He was critical of the elders who had been involved in his disfellowshipping. So for the next few studies, we discussed scriptures on pride and its effects. Graham began to see himself clearly in the mirror of God's

12-14. (a) In what ways do some react to divine discipline? (b) How did God's Word help one brother to adjust his attitude, and with what results?

Word, and he did not like what he saw! The effect was amazing! After acknowledging that he had been blinded by a 'rafter' of pride and that his critical attitude was *his* problem, he began to change quickly for the better. He started to attend Christian meetings regularly, to study God's Word earnestly, and to make daily prayer a habit. He also accepted his spiritual responsibilities as family head, much to the delight of his wife and children."—Luke 6:41, 42; Jas. 1:23-25.

¹⁴ The elder continues: "One day, Graham told me something that touched my heart. 'I've known the truth for years,' he said, 'and I've even served as a pioneer. But only now can I honestly say that I love Jehovah.' Before long, he was asked to serve as a microphone handler at the Kingdom Hall—a privilege he deeply appreciated. His example taught me that when a person humbles himself before God by accepting discipline, blessings just pour out!"

WHEN GIVING DISCIPLINE, IMITATE GOD AND CHRIST

¹⁵ To be good teachers, we first have to be good students. (1 Tim. 4:15, 16) Likewise, those divinely authorized to give discipline must themselves continue to submit willingly to Jehovah's guidance. Such humble submission earns them respect and gives them freeness of speech when training or correcting others. Consider Jesus' example.

¹⁶ Jesus always listened obediently to

15. If we want our discipline to reach hearts, what must we do?

16. What are some lessons about appropriate discipline and effective teaching that we can learn from Jesus?

his Father, even when doing so was very difficult. (Matt. 26:39) And he gave his Father the credit for his teachings and wisdom. (John 5:19, 30) Jesus' humility and obedience drew people of honest heart to him and helped to make him a compassionate and gracious teacher. **(Read Matthew 11:29.)** His kind words heartened those who were figuratively like a bruised reed or the wick of an oil lamp about to go out. (Matt. 12:20) Even when his patience was tested, Jesus was kind and loving. This was evident when he corrected his apostles for showing a selfish, ambitious spirit. —Mark 9:33-37; Luke 22:24-27.

¹⁷ All who are authorized to give Scriptural discipline are wise when they imitate Christ's example. Indeed, their doing so reflects their desire to be molded by God and his Son. The apostle Peter wrote: "Shepherd the flock of God under your care, serving as overseers, not under compulsion, but willingly before God; not for love of dishonest gain, but eagerly; not lording it over those who are God's inheritance, but becoming examples to the flock." (1 Pet. 5:2-4) To be sure, overseers who joyfully submit to God and to Christ, the head of the congregation, benefit both themselves and those under their care.—Isa. 32:1, 2, 17, 18.

¹⁸ The same basic principles apply in the family. Family heads are told: "Do not be irritating your children, but go on bringing them up in the discipline and admonition of Jehovah." (Eph. 6:4)

17. What fine qualities will help elders to be effective shepherds of God's flock?

18. (a) What does Jehovah require of parents? (b) How does God help parents fulfill their responsibilities?

How serious is this matter? Proverbs 19:18 states: "Discipline your son while there is hope, and do not become responsible for his death." Yes, Jehovah holds Christian parents accountable if they fail to provide needed discipline to a child! (1 Sam. 3:12-14) However, Jehovah gives parents the wisdom and the strength they need when they humbly entreat him in prayer and look to his Word and holy spirit for guidance. —**Read James 1:5.**

LEARNING HOW TO LIVE FOREVER IN PEACE

¹⁹ It would be difficult to enumerate all the blessings that result from accepting divine discipline and from imitating Jehovah and Jesus when disciplining others. At the very least, families and congregations become havens of peace. Individuals also feel truly loved, valued, and secure—a foretaste of the blessings to come. (Ps. 72:7) Indeed, it is no exaggeration to say that Jehovah's discipline teaches us how to live together forever in peace and harmony as a family under his fatherly care. **(Read Isaiah 11:9.)** When we view divine discipline in that light, we will be more likely to appreciate it for what it truly is: beautiful evidence of God's unmatched love for us.

²⁰ In the following article, we will expand on aspects of discipline within the family and the congregation. We will also consider self-discipline as well as something that can be even worse than any temporary pain that discipline may cause.

19, 20. (a) What blessings result from accepting God's discipline? (b) What will we consider in the next article?



“Listen to Discipline and Become Wise”

“My sons, . . . listen to discipline and become wise.”

—PROV. 8:32, 33.

SONGS: 56, 89

HOW WOULD YOU ANSWER?

In what ways does Jehovah patiently teach us self-discipline?

How can parents raise their children in the discipline of Jehovah?

How can we benefit fully from any Scriptural discipline we may receive in the Christian congregation?

Jehovah is the Source of wisdom, and he generously shares his wisdom with others. Says James 1:5: “If any one of you is lacking in wisdom, let him keep asking God, for he gives generously to all and without reproaching.” One way that we acquire wisdom from God is by accepting his discipline. And that wisdom can safeguard us from moral and spiritual harm. (Prov. 2:10-12) As a result, we “keep [ourselves] in God’s love . . . with everlasting life in view.”—Jude 21.

² However, our sinful leanings, our upbringing, and other factors make it a challenge to accept discipline or to view it in the right light. We build appreciation for discipline when we experience its benefits, which confirm God’s love for us. “My son, do not reject the discipline of Jehovah, . . . for those whom Jehovah loves he reproves,” says Proverbs 3:11, 12. Yes, let us never forget that Jehovah has our best interests at heart. **(Read Hebrews 12:5-11.)** Because God fully knows us, his discipline is always appropriate and properly measured. Let us now examine four aspects of discipline: (1) self-discipline, (2) parental discipline, (3) discipline

1. How do we acquire wisdom, and with what benefit?
2. How can we build appreciation for God’s discipline?

within the Christian congregation, and (4) something that is worse than the temporary pain of discipline.

SELF-DISCIPLINE SHOWS WISDOM

³ Self-discipline includes exercising control over ourselves in order to improve in our behavior and thinking. We are not born with an inclination toward self-discipline. We have to learn it. To illustrate: When a child first learns to ride a bicycle, a parent usually holds the bicycle to steady it. But as the child finds his balance, the parent cautiously lets go for a few moments at a time. He lets go altogether when the child can keep his balance. Likewise, when parents consistently and patiently train their little ones “in the discipline and admonition of Jehovah,” they are also helping their children to develop self-discipline and wisdom.—Eph. 6:4.

⁴ The same principles apply to those who come to know Jehovah as adults. True, they may already have developed a measure of self-discipline. Spiritually speaking, however, a new disciple starts off being immature. But he or she can steadily grow toward maturity as part of learning to put on the Christlike “new personality.” (Eph. 4:23, 24) Self-discipline is an important part of that growth. As a result, we learn “to reject ungodliness and worldly desires and to live with soundness of mind and righteousness and godly devotion amid this present system of things.”—Titus 2:12.

⁵ That said, we are all prone to sin.

3. How does a child develop self-discipline? Illustrate.

4, 5. (a) Why is self-discipline an important part of “the new personality”? (b) Why should we not give up on ourselves even if we “fall seven times,” as it were?

(Eccl. 7:20) A fall, however, need not spell complete failure or a serious lack of self-discipline. “The righteous one may fall seven times, and he will get up again,” says Proverbs 24:16. What will help him to succeed? Not sheer willpower, but God’s spirit. **(Read Philippians 4:13.)** The fruitage of that spirit includes self-control, which is closely related to self-discipline.

⁶ Also important to cultivating self-discipline are heartfelt prayer, Bible study, and meditation. But what if you find it hard to study God’s Word? Perhaps you do not consider yourself to be studious. Keep in mind, however, that Jehovah will help you if you let him. He can help you to “form a longing” for his Word. (1 Pet. 2:2) First, pray to Jehovah for the needed self-discipline to study his Word. Then, work in harmony with your prayers, perhaps keeping study periods rather short. Over time, study will be both easier and more pleasurable! Indeed, you will find yourself cherishing your quiet times when you are absorbed in Jehovah’s precious thoughts.—1 Tim. 4:15.

⁷ Self-discipline helps us to reach spiritual goals. Consider the example of a family man who felt that his zeal was waning somewhat. Concerned, he set the goal of becoming a regular pioneer and read articles on that topic in our magazines. This, along with prayer, built him up and strengthened him spiritually. He also arranged to be an auxiliary pioneer when he could. The result? Despite obstacles, he kept his eye on the goal of

6. How can we become better students of God’s Word? (See opening picture.)

7. How can self-discipline help us to reach a spiritual goal?



Children are not born knowing right from wrong; they need training
(See paragraph 8)

becoming a regular pioneer and eventually reached it.

RAISE CHILDREN IN THE DISCIPLINE OF JEHOVAH

⁸ Christian parents have a precious privilege—that of raising their children “in the discipline and admonition of Jehovah.” (Eph. 6:4) That is a major undertaking, especially in today’s world. (2 Tim. 3:1-5) Of course, children are not born knowing right from wrong. They are born with the faculty of conscience, but it needs to be educated, or disciplined. (Rom. 2:14, 15) One Bible reference work suggests that the Greek word translated “discipline” might be rendered “child development.”

⁹ Children who are lovingly disciplined usually feel secure. They learn that freedom has boundaries and that decisions

8-10. What can help Christian parents succeed in raising their children to serve Jehovah? Illustrate.

and conduct have consequences—good or bad. How important, then, that Christian parents look to Jehovah for guidance. Do not forget that ideas and methods vary from culture to culture and from generation to generation. When parents listen to God, successful child-rearing does not become a matter of guesswork; nor does it depend on human experience or human thinking.

¹⁰ By way of illustration, consider the example of Noah. When Jehovah told him to build the ark, Noah could not rely on experience. He had never built an ark before. So he had to rely on Jehovah, doing “just so”—that is, just as Jehovah directed. (Gen. 6:22) The result? Noah got it right the first time. Indeed, he had to! Noah also succeeded as a family man—and for basically the same reason; he trusted in God’s wisdom. He thus taught his children well and set a fine example for them, which was a big challenge during that wicked pre-Flood era.—Gen. 6:5.

¹¹ As parents, how can you do “just so” in God’s eyes? Listen to Jehovah. Let him instruct you in child-rearing by means of his Word and the guidance we receive through his organization. In time, your children will likely thank you for doing that! One brother wrote: “I am filled with gratitude for the way my parents raised me. They did their best to reach my heart. Much of the credit for my spiritual advancement must go to them.” However, despite the parents’ best efforts, some children leave Jehovah. Nonetheless, parents who have tried their best to impress the truth on a child’s heart have a good con-

11. How important is parental example in training children?

science. They can also hope that the wayward child will one day come “home” to Jehovah.

¹² One of the greatest tests of obedience that some parents have involves their relationship with a disfellowshipped child. Consider the example of a mother whose disfellowshipped daughter left home. The mother admits: “I looked for loopholes in our publications so that I could spend time with my daughter and my granddaughter.” She adds: “But my husband kindly helped me to see that our child was now out of our hands and that we must not interfere.”

¹³ Some years later, the daughter was reinstated. “Now she calls or texts me nearly every day!” the mother said. “And she deeply respects my husband and me because she knows that we obeyed God. We have a wonderful relationship.” If you have a disfellowshipped child, will you “trust in Jehovah with all your heart [and] not rely on your own understanding”? (Prov. 3:5, 6) Remember, Jehovah’s discipline reflects his matchless wisdom and love. Never forget that he gave his Son for all, including your child. God wants no one to be destroyed. **(Read 2 Peter 3:9.)** So have faith in Jehovah’s discipline and direction. Do so even when it pains you, the parent, to do what Jehovah says. Yes, work with God’s discipline, not against it.

IN THE CONGREGATION

¹⁴ Jehovah has promised to care for,

12, 13. (a) If a child is disfellowshipped, how do Christian parents show that they obey God? (b) How did one family benefit from the parents’ obedience to Jehovah?

14. How do we benefit from Jehovah’s instruction provided by means of “the faithful steward”?

protect, and instruct the Christian congregation. He does so in a number of ways. For example, he has placed the congregation under the care of his Son, who appointed a “faithful steward” to provide timely spiritual food. (Luke 12:42) Made available in many ways, that food provides valuable instruction, or discipline. Ask yourself, ‘How often has a talk or an article in one of our journals moved me to make adjustments in my thinking or conduct?’ If you have responded positively, rejoice! You are allowing Jehovah to mold, or discipline, you for your benefit.—Prov. 2:1-5.

¹⁵ Christ also gave to the congregation “gifts in men”—elders to shepherd God’s flock. (Eph. 4:8, 11-13) How can we benefit from those precious gifts? One way is to imitate the faith of the elders as well as their fine example. Another way is to heed their Scriptural counsel. **(Read Hebrews 13:7, 17.)** Remember, the elders love us and want us to grow spiritually. For instance, if they notice that we are missing meetings or that our zeal is cooling off, they will no doubt quickly come to our aid. They will listen to us and then try to build us up with warm encouragement and appropriate Scriptural counsel. Do you view such help as an expression of Jehovah’s love for you?

¹⁶ Keep in mind that elders may find that it is not easy to approach us with needed counsel. Imagine, for example, how difficult it must have been for the prophet Nathan to speak to David after the king tried to cover up his gross sin! (2 Sam. 12:1-14) Similarly, the apostle

15, 16. (a) How can we benefit from the “gifts in men” in the congregation? (b) How can we make the elders’ work more pleasant for them?

Paul no doubt had to muster up courage to provide correction when Peter, one of the 12 apostles, showed favoritism toward his Jewish brothers. (Gal. 2:11-14) So how can you ease the load for the elders in your congregation? Be humble, approachable, and thankful. See their help as an expression of God's love for you. This will not only benefit you but also add much joy to their work.

¹⁷ Because of her past experience, one sister found it hard to love Jehovah. "When my past and other issues brought me to emotional exhaustion," she said, "I knew that I had to talk with the elders. They did not berate me or criticize me, but they encouraged me and strengthened me. After every congregation meeting, no matter how busy they were, at least one of them would ask how I was. Because of my past, I found it difficult to feel worthy of God's love. Time and time again, however, Jehovah has used the congregation and the elders to confirm his love for me. I pray that I will never let him go."

WHAT IS WORSE THAN ANY PAIN OF DISCIPLINE?

¹⁸ While discipline may be painful, there is something that is even more painful—the harm that may result

17. How did one sister benefit from the loving help of the elders in the congregation?

18, 19. What is worse than any pain that may result from discipline? Illustrate.

from rejecting discipline. (Heb. 12:11) Consider two examples—Cain and King Zedekiah. When Cain developed a murderous hatred toward Abel, God admonished Cain: "Why are you so angry and dejected? If you turn to doing good, will you not be restored to favor? But if you do not turn to doing good, sin is crouching at the door, and its craving is to dominate you; but will you get the mastery over it?" (Gen. 4:6, 7) Cain did not listen. Then sin overwhelmed him. What needless pain and suffering Cain brought on himself! (Gen. 4:11, 12) The pain of Jehovah's reprimand would have been mild by comparison.

¹⁹ A weak and wicked ruler, Zedekiah reigned during very dark days for Jerusalem. The prophet Jeremiah repeatedly exhorted Zedekiah to leave his bad ways, but the king refused to be disciplined. Again, the results were tragic. (Jer. 52:8-11) How Jehovah wants to spare us from such needless suffering!—**Read Isaiah 48:17, 18.**

²⁰ In the world, discipline, including self-discipline, is often sneered at. But that foolish attitude will soon catch up with the wicked. (Prov. 1:24-31) So let us "listen to discipline and become wise." As Proverbs 4:13 states, "hold on to discipline; do not let it go. Safeguard it, for it means your life."

20. What does the future hold for those who accept God's discipline and for those who refuse to accept it?



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